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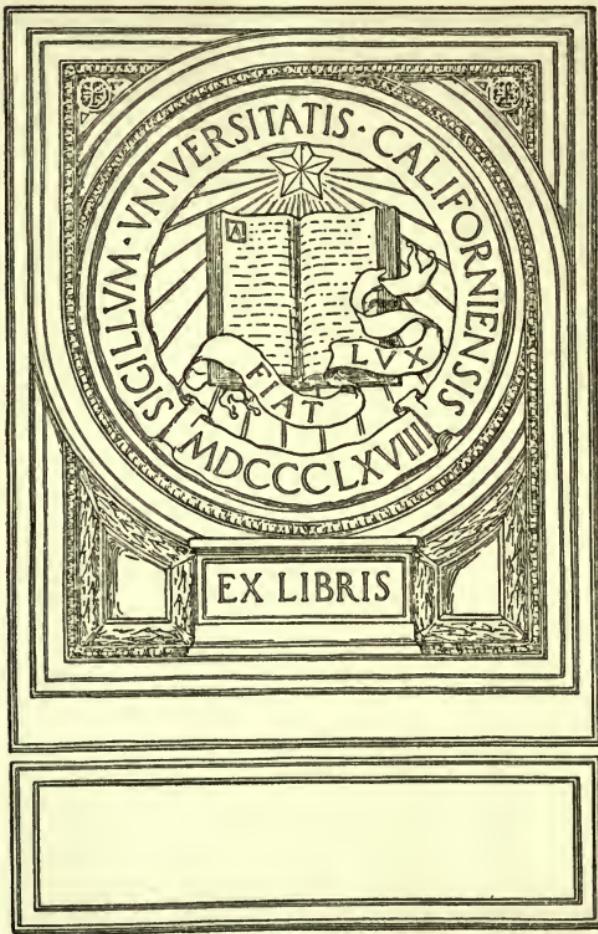
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The Lonesome Trail

John G.
Neihardt



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William A. S. Kendall.



THE LONESOME TRAIL



Drawn by F. E. Schoonover

THE RACE WITH THE FIRE

See "The Nemesis of the Deuces," page 30

THE LONESOME TRAIL

BY
JOHN G. NEIHARDT

*“In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.”*

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BY

JOHN G. NEIHARDT

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TO

VOLNEY STREAMER

"Friend of my Yester-age"

M555071

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THE OLD CRY

*O Mourner in the silence of the hills,
O Thing of ancient griefs, art thou a wolf?
I heard a cry that shook me—was it thine?*

*Low in the mystic purple of the west
The weird moon hangs, a tarnished silver slug:
Vast, vast the hollow empty night curves down,
Stabbed with the glass-like glinting of the stars,
And, save when that wild cry grows up anon,
No sound but this dull murmur of the hush—
The winter hush.*

*Hark! once again thy cry!
Thy strange, sharp, ice-like, tenuous complaint,
As though the spirit of this frozen waste
Pinched with the cruel frost yearned summerward!*

*I know thou art a wolf that criest so:
Though hidden in the shadow, I can see
Thy four feet huddled in the numbing frost,
Thy snout, breath-whitened, pointing to the sky:
Poor pariah of the plains, I know 'tis thou.*

*And yet—and yet—I heard a kinsman shout!
Down through the intricate centuries it came,
A far-blown cry! From old-world graves it grew,
Up through the tumbled walls of ancient realms,
Up through the lizard-haunted heaps of stone,
Up through the choking ashes of old fanes,
The pitiful debris where Grandeur dwelt,
Out of the old-world wilderness it grew—
The cry I know! And I have heard my Kin!*

I

THE ALIEN

THROUGH the quiet night, crystalline with the pervading spirit of the frost, under prairie skies of mystic purple pierced with the glass-like glinting of the stars, fled Antoine.

Huge and hollow-sounding with the clatter of the pinto's hoofs hung the night above and about—lonesome, empty, bitter as the soul of him who fled.

A weary age of flight since sunset; and now the midnight saw the thin-limbed, long-haired pony slowly losing his nerve, tottering, rasping in the throat. With pitiless spike-spurred heels the rider hurled the beast into the empty night.

“Gwan! you blasted cayuse! you overgrown wolf-dog! you pot-bellied shonga! Keep up that tune; I'm goin' somewhere. What'd I steal you fer? Pleasure? He, he, he, ho, ho, ho! I reckon; pleasure for the half-breed! Gwan!”

Suddenly rounding a bank of sand, the pinto sighted the broad, ice-bound river, an elysian stream of glinting silver under the stars. Sniffing and crouching upon its haunches at the sudden glow that dwindled a gleaming thread into the further dusk, the jaded beast received a series of vicious jabs from the spike-spurred heels. It groaned and lunged for

ward again, taking with uncertain feet the glaring path ahead, and awakening dull, snarling thunder in the under regions of the ice. Slipping, struggling, doing its brute best to overcome fatigue and the uncertainty of its path, the pinto covered the ice.

“Doin’ a war dance, eh?” growled the man with bitter mirth, and gouging the foaming bloody flanks of the animal. “Gwan! Set up that tune; I want fast music, ’cause I’m goin’ somewhere—don’t know where—somewhere out there in the shadders! Come here, will you? Take that and that and *that!* Now will you kick the scen’ry back’ards? By the——!”

The brutal cries of the man were cut short as he shot far over the pommel, lunging headlong over the pinto’s head, and striking with head and shoulders upon the glare ice. When he stopped sliding he lay very still for a few moments. Then he groaned, sat up, and found that the bluffs and the river and the stars and the universe in general were whirling giddily, with himself for the dizzy centre.

With uncertain arms he reached out, endeavouring to check the sickening motion of things with the sheer force of his powerful hands. He was thrown down like a weakling wrestling with a giant. He lay still, cursing in a whisper, trying to steady the universe, until the motion passed, leaving in his nerves the sickening sensation incident to the sudden ending of a rapid flight.

With great care Antoine raised himself upon his elbows and gazed about with an imbecile leer. Then

he began to remember; remembered that he was hunted; that he was an outcast, a man of no race; remembered dimly, and with a malignant grin, a portion of a long series of crimes; remembered that the last was horse-stealing and that some of the others concerned blood. And as he remembered, he felt with horrible distinctness the lariat tightening about his neck—the lariat that the men of Cabanne's trading post were bringing on fleet horses, nearer, nearer, nearer through the silent night.

Antoine shuddered and got to his feet, looming huge against the star-sprent surface of the ice, as he turned a face of bestial malevolence down trail and listened for the beat of hoofs. There was only the dim, hollow murmur that dwells at the heart of silence.

“Got a long start,” he observed, with the chuckle of a man whom desperation has made careless. “Hel-lo!”

A pale, semicircular glow, like the flare of a burning straw stack a half day's journey over the hills, had grown up at the horizon of the east; and as the man stared, still in a maze from his recent fall, the moon heaved a tarnished silver arc above the mystic rim of sky, flooding with new light the river and the bluffs. The man stood illumined—a big brute of a man, heavy-limbed, massive-shouldered, with the slouching stoop and the alert air of an habitual skulker. He moved uneasily, as though he had suddenly become visible to some lurking foe. He

glanced nervously about him, fumbled at the butt of a six-shooter at his belt, then catching sight of the blotch of huddled dusk that was the fallen pinto, the meaning of the situation flashed upon him.

"That cussed cayuse! Gone and done hisself like as not! Damn me! the whole creation 's agin me!"

He made for the pony, snarling viciously as though its exhausted, lacerated self were the visible body of the inimical universe. He grasped the reins and jerked them violently. The brute only groaned and let its weary head fall heavily upon the ice.

"Get up!"

Antoine began kicking the pony in the ribs, bringing forth great hollow bellowings of pain.

"O, you won't get up, eh? Agin me too, eh? Take that, and that and *that!* I wished you was everybody in the whole world and hell to oniset, I'd make you beller now I got you down! Take *that!*"

The man with a roar of anger fell upon the pony, snarling, striking, kicking, but the pony only groaned. Its limbs could no longer support its body. When Antoine had exhausted his rage, he got up, gave the pony a parting kick on the nose, and started off at a dogtrot across the glinting ice towards the bluffs beyond.

Ever and anon he stopped and whirled about with hand at ear. He heard only the sullen murmur of the silence, broken occasionally by the whine and pop of the ice and the plaintive, bitter wail of the coyotes

somewhere in the hills, like the heartbroken cry of the lonesome prairie, yearning for the summer.

"O, I wouldn't howl if I was you," muttered the man to the coyotes; "I wished I was a coyote or a grey wolf, knowin' what I do. I'd be a man-killer and a cattle-killer, I would. And then I'd have people of my own. Wouldn't be no cur of a half-breed runnin' from his kind. O, I wouldn't howl if I was you!"

He proceeded at a swinging trot across the half mile of ice and halted under the bluffs. He listened intently. A far sound had grown up in the hollow night—vague, but unmistakable. It was the clatter of hoofs far away, but clear in faintness, for the cold snap had made the prairie one vast sounding-board. A light snow had fallen the night before, and the trail of the refugee was traced in the moonlight, distinct as a wagon track.

Antoine felt the pitiless pinch of the approaching lariat as he listened. Then his accustomed bitter weariness of life came upon the pariah.

"What's the use of me runnin'? What am I runnin' to? Nothin'—only more of the same thing I'm runnin' from; lonesomeness and hunger and the like of that. Gettin' awake stiff and cold and half starved and cussin' the daylight 'cause it's agin me like everything else, and gives me away. Sneakin' around in the brush till dark, eatin' when I can like a damned wolf, then goin' to sleep hopin' it'll never get day. But it always does. It's all night somewhere, I guess,

spite of what the missionaries says. That's fer me—night always! No comin' day, no gettin' up, somewhere to hide snug in always!"

He walked on with head dropped forward upon his breast, skirting the base of the bluffs, now seemingly oblivious of the sound of hoofs that grew momentarily more distinct.

As he walked, he was dimly conscious of passing the dark mouth of a hole running back into the clay of a bluff. He proceeded until he found himself again at the edge of the river, staring down into a broad, black fissure in the ice, caused, doubtless, by the dash of the current crossing from the other side.

A terrible, dark, but alluring thought seized him. Here was the place—the doorway to that place where it was always night! Why not go in? There would be no more running away, no more hiding, no more hatred of men, no more lonesomeness! Here was the place at last.

He stepped forward and stooped to gaze down into the door of night. The rushing waters made a dismal, moaning sound.

He stared transfixed. Yes, he would go!

Suddenly a shudder ran through his limbs. He gave a quick exclamation of terror! He leaped back and raised his face to the skies.

How kind and soft and gentle and good to look upon was the sky! He gazed about—it was so fair a world! How good it was to breathe! He longed to throw his great, brute arms about creation and

clutch it to him, and hold it, hold it, hold it! He wished to live.

The hoofs!

The distant muffled confusion of sound had grown into sharp, distinct, staccato notes. The pursuers were now less than a mile away. Soon they would reach the river.

With the quick instinct of the hunted beast, Antoine knew the means of safety. His footprints led to the ice-fissure. He decided that none should lead away. He could not be pursued under ice. Stooping so that he could look between his legs, he began retracing his steps, walking backward, placing his feet with infinite care where they had fallen before. Thus he came again to the hole in the clay bluff, and disappeared. His trail had passed within a foot of the hole, which was overhung by a jutting point of sandstone. No snow had fallen at the entrance; he left no trail as he entered.

Stopping upon his hands and knees, he listened and could hear distinctly the sharp crack of hoofs upon the ice and the pop and thunder of the frozen surface.

“Here’s *some* luck,” muttered Antoine. He crawled on into the nether darkness of the hole that grew more spacious as he proceeded. As he crawled, the sound of pursuing hoofs grew dimmer. Antoine half forgot them. His keen sense had caught the peculiar musty odour of animal life. He felt a stuffy warmth in his nostrils as he breathed.

Suddenly out of the dark ahead grew up two points

of phosphorescent light. Antoine fell back upon his haunches with a little growl of surprise in his throat. Years of wild lonesome life had made him more beast than man.

The lights slowly came closer, growing more brilliant. Then there was a harsh, rasping growl and a sound of sniffing. Antoine waited until the expanding pupils of his eyes could grasp the situation with more distinctness. "Can't run," he mused. "Lariat behind, somethin' growlin' in front. It's one more fight. Here goes fer my damnedest. Rather die mad and fightin' than jump into cold water or stick my head through a rawhide necktie!"

He crawled on carefully. The lights approached with a strange swaying motion. Then of a sudden came a whine, a sharp, savage yelp, and Antoine felt his cheek ripped open with a stroke of gnashing teeth!

He felt for an instant the hot breath of the beast, the trickle of hot blood on his cheek; and then all that was human in him passed. He growled and hurled the sinewy body of his unseen foe from him with a blow of his bear-like paw. He was a big man, and in his blood the primitive beast had grown large through long years of lonesome hiding from his kind.

The dark hole echoed a muffled howl of anger, and in an instant man and beast rolled together in the darkness. It was a primitive struggle; the snapping of jaws, the rasping of hoarse throats that laboured

with angry breath, snarlings of hate, yelps of pain, growls, whines.

At last the man knew that it was a grey wolf he fought. He reached for its throat, but felt his hand caught in a hot, wet, powerful trap of teeth. He grasped the under jaw with a grip that made his antagonist howl with pain. Then with his other hand he felt about in the darkness, groping for the throat.

He found it, seized it with a vice-like clutch, shut his teeth together, and threw all of the power of his massive frame into the struggle.

Slowly, slowly, the struggles of the wolf became weaker. The lean, hairy form fell limply, and the man laughed with a strange, sobbing, guttural mirth—for he was master.

Then again he felt the trickle of blood upon his cheek, the ache of his bitten hand. His anger returned with double fury. He kicked the limp body as he lay beside it, never releasing his grip.

Suddenly he forgot to kick. There were sounds! He heard the *thump thump* of hoofs passing his place of refuge. Then they ceased. There were sounds of voices coming dimly; then after a while the hoofs passed again, and there was a voice that said "saved hangin' anyway."

The hoof beats grew dimmer, and Antoine knew by their hollow sound that his pursuers had begun to cross the ice on the back trail. He again gave his attention to the wolf. It lay very still. A feeling of supreme comfort came over Antoine. It was

sweet to be a master. He laid his head upon the wolf's motionless body. He was very weary, he had conquered, and he would sleep upon his prey.

He awoke feeling a warm, rasping something upon his wounded cheek. A faint light came in at the entrance of the place. It was morning. In his sleep Antoine had moved his head close to the muzzle of the wolf. Now, utterly conquered, bruised, unable to arise, the brute was feebly licking the blood from the man's wound.

Antoine's sense of mastery after his sound sleep made him kind for once. He was safe and something had caressed him, altho' it was only a soundly-beaten wolf.

"You pore devil!" said Antoine with a sudden softness in his voice; "I done you up, didn't I? You hain't so bad, I guess; but if I hadn't done you, I'd got done myself. Hurt much, you pore devil, eh?"

He stroked the side of the animal, whereupon it cried out with pain.

"Pretty sore, eh? Well as long as I'm bigger'n you, I'll be good to you, I will. I ain't so bad, am I? You treat me square and you won't never get no bad deals from the half-breed; mind that. *Hel-lo!* you're a *Miss Wolf*, ain't you? Well, for the present, I'm a *Mister Wolf*, and I'm a good un! Let me hunt you up a name; somethin' soft like a woman, 'cause you did touch me kind of tender like. *Susette!* —that's it—*Susette*. You're *Susette* now. I hain't got no people, so I'm a wolf from now on, and my

name's Antoine. Susette and Antoine—sounds pretty good, don't it? Say, I know as much about bein' a wolf as you do. Can't teach me nothin' about sneak-in' and hidin' and fightin'! Say, old girl, *hain't* I a tol'able good fighter now? O, I know I am, and when you need it again, you're goin' to get it good and hard, Susette; mind that. Hain't got nothin' to eat about the house, have you, old girl? Then, bein' head of the family with a sick woman about, I'm goin' huntin'. Don't you let no other wolf come skulkin' around! You know me! I'll wear his skin when I come back, if you don't mind!"

And he went out.

Before noon he returned bringing three jack rabbits, having shot them with his six-shooter. "Well, Susette," said he, "got any appetite?"

He passed his hand over the wolf's snout caressingly. The wolf flinched in fear, but the man continued his caresses until she licked his hand.

"Now we're friends and we can live together peaceable, can't we? Took a big family row, though. Families needs stirrin' up now and then, I reckon."

He skinned a rabbit and cut off morsels of meat.

"Here, Susette, I'm goin' to fill your hide first, 'cause you've been so good since the row that I'm half beginnin' to love you a little. There, that's it—eat. Does me good to see you eat, pore, sick Susette!"

The wolf took the morsels from his hand and a look almost tame came into her eyes. When she had

eaten a rabbit, Antoine had a meal of raw flesh. Then he sat down beside her and stroked her nose and neck and flanks. There was an air of home about the place. He was safe and sheltered, had a full stomach, and there was a fellow creature near him that showed kindness, altho' it had been won with a beating. But this man had long been accustomed to possessing by violence, and he was satisfied.

"Susette," he said in a soft voice; "don't get mean again when you get well. I want to live quiet and like somethin' that likes me oncet. If you'll be good, I'll get you rabbits and antelope and birds, and you won't need to hunt no more nor go about with your belly flappin' together. And I know how to make fire —somethin' you don't know, wise as you be; and I'll keep you warm and pet you.

"Is it a bargain? All you need to do is just be good, keepin' your teeth out'n my cheek. I've been lonesome always. I hain't got no people. Do you know who your dad was, Susette? Neither do I. Some French trader was mine, I guess. We're in the same boat there. My mother was an Omaha. O Susette, I know what it means to set a stranger in my mother's lodge. '*Wagah peazzha!*' [no good white man], that's what the Omahas called me ever since I was a little feller. And the white men said 'damn Injun.' And where am I? O, hangin' onto the edge of things, gettin' ornry and nasty and bad! I've stole horses and killed people and cussed fer days, Susette. And I want to rest; I want to love

somethin'. Cabanne's men down at the post would laugh to hear me sayin' that. But I do. I want to love somethin'. Tried to oncet; her name was Susette, jest like your'n. She was a trader's daughter—a pretty French girl. That was before I got bad. I talked sweet to her like I'm a talkin' to you, and she kind of liked it. But the old man Lecroix—that was her dad—he showed me the trail and he says: 'Go that way and go fast, you damn Injun!'

"I went, Susette, but I made him pay, I did. I seen him on his back a-grinnin' straight up at the stars; and since then I hain't cared much. I killed several after that, and I called 'em all Lecroix!"

"Be a good girl, Susette, and I'll stick to you. I'm a good fighter, you know, and I'm a good grub-hunter, too. I learned all that easy."

He continued caressing the wolf, and she licked his hand when he stroked her muzzle.

Days passed; the winter deepened; the heavy snows came. Antoine nursed his bruised companion back to health. Through the bitter nights he kept a fire burning at the entrance of the hole. The depth of the snow made it improbable that any should learn his whereabouts; and by that time the news must have spread from post to post that Antoine, the outlaw half-breed, had drowned himself in the ice-fissure.

The man had used all his ammunition, and his six-shooter had thus become useless. With the skill of an Indian he wrought a bow and arrows. He made snowshoes and continued to hunt, keeping the wolf

in meat until she grew strong and fat with the unaccustomed luxurious life.

Also she became very tame. During her weakness the man had subdued her, and through the long nights she lay nestled within the man's great arms and slept.

When the snow became crusted, Antoine and Susette went hunting together, she trotting at his heels like a dog. To her he had come to be only an unusually large wolf—a masterful male, a good fighter, strong to kill, a taker of his own.

One evening in late December, when the low moon threw a shaft of cold silver into the mouth of the lair, Antoine lay huddled in his furs, listening to the long, dirge-like calls of the wolves wandering inward from the vast pitiless night. Susette also listened, sitting upon her haunches beside the man with her ears pricked forward. When the far away cries of her kinspeople arose into a compelling major sound, dying away into the merest shadow of a pitiful minor, she switched her tail uneasily, shuffled about nervously, sniffing and whining.

Then she began pacing with an eager swing up and down the place to the opening and back to the man, sending forth the cry of kinship whenever she reached the moonlit entrance.

"Night's cold, Susette," said Antoine; "tain't no time fer huntin'. Hain't I give you enough to eat? Come here and snuggle up and let's sleep."

He caught the wolf and with main force held her

down beside him. She snarled savagely and snapped her jaws together, struggling out of his arms and going to the opening where she cried out into the frozen stillness. The answer of her kind floated back in doleful chorus.

"Don't go!" begged the man. "Susette, my pretty Susette! I'll be so lonesome."

As the chorus died, the wolf gave a loud yelp and rushed out into the night. A terrible rage seized Antoine. He leaped from his furs and ran out after the wolf. She fled with a rapid, swinging trot over the scintillating snow toward the concourse of her people. The man fled after, slipping, falling, getting up, running, running, and ever the wolf widened the glittering stretch of snow between them. To Antoine, the ever-widening space of glinting coldness vaguely symbolised the barrier that seemed growing between him and his last companion.

"Susette, O, Susette!" he cried at last, breathless and exhausted. His cry was dirgelike, even as the wolves'; thin and sharp and icelike—the voice of the old world-ache.

She had disappeared in the dusk of a ravine. Antoine, huddled in the snows with his face upon his knees, sobbed in the winter stillness. At last, with slow and faltering step, he returned to his lair; and for the first time in months he felt the throat-pang of the alien.

He threw himself down upon the floor of the cave and cursed the world. Then he cursed Susette.

"It's some other wolf!" he hissed. "Some other grey dog that she's gone to see. O, damn him! damn his grey hide! I'll kill her when she comes back!"

He took out his knife and began whetting it viciously upon his boot.

"I'll cut her into strips and eat 'em! Wasn't I good to her? O, I'll cut her into strips!"

He whetted his knife for an hour, cursing the while through his set teeth. At last his anger grew into a foolish madness. He hurled himself upon the bunch of furs beside him and imagined that they were Susette. He set his teeth into the furs, he crushed them with his hands, he tore at them with his nails. Then in the impotence of his anger, he fell upon his face and sobbed himself to sleep.

Strange visions passed before him. Again he killed Lecroix, and saw the dead face grinning at the stars. Again he sat in his mother's lodge and wept because he was a stranger. Again he was fleeing, fleeing, fleeing from a leather noose that hung above him like a black cloud, and circled and lowered and raised and lowered until it swooped down upon him and closed about his neck.

With a yell of fright he awoke from his nightmare. His head throbbed, his mouth was parched. At last day came in sneakingly through the opening—a dull, melancholy light; and with it came Susette, sniffing, with the bristles of her neck erect.

"Susette! Susette!" cried the man joyfully.

He no longer thought of killing her. He seized

her in his arms; he kissed her frost-whitened muzzle; he caressed her; he called her a woman. She received his caresses with disdain. Whereat the man redoubled his acts of fondness. He fed her and petted her as she ate; whereat the bristles on her neck fell. She nosed him half fondly.

And Antoine, man-like, was glad again. He contented himself with touching the frayed hem of the garment of Happiness.

He ate none that day. He said to himself, "I won't hunt till it's all gone; she can have it all." He was afraid to leave Susette. He was afraid to take her with him again into the land of her own people. Antoine was jealous.

All day he was kind to her with the pitiful kindness of a doting lover for his unfaithful mistress.

That night she consented to lie within his arms, and Antoine cried softly as he whispered into her ear: "Susette, I hain't a goin' to be jealous no more. You've been a bad girl, Susette. Don't do it again. I won't be mean less'n you let *him* come skulkin' round here, damn his grey hide! But O, Susette"—his voice was like a spoken pang—"I wisht—I wisht I was that other wolf!"

The next morning Antoine did not get up. He felt sore and exhausted. By evening his heart was beating like a hammer. His head ached and swam; his burning eyes saw strange, uncertain visions.

"Susette," he called, "I hain't quite right; come here and let me touch you again."

Night was falling and Susette sat sullenly apart, listening for the call of her people. She did not go to him. All night the man tossed and raved. After a lingering age of delirious wanderings, dizzy flights from huge pitiless pursuers, he became conscious of the daylight. He raised his head feebly and looked about the den. Susette was gone. A fury of jealousy again seized Antoine. She had gone to that other wolf—he felt certain of that. He tried to arise, but the fever had weakened him so that he lay impotently, torn alternately with anger and longing.

Suddenly a frost-whitened snout was thrust in at the opening. It was Susette. The man was too weak to cry out his joy, but his eyes filled with a soft light.

Susette entered sniffing strangely, whining and switching her tail as she came. At her heels followed another grey wolf—a male, larger-boned, lanker, with a more powerful snout. He whined and moved his tail nervously at sight of the man.

Antoine lay staring impotently upon the intruder. “So that’s him,” thought the man; “I wisht I could get up.”

A delirious anger shook him; he struggled to arise, but could not. “O God,” he moaned; it was an unusual thing for this man to say the word so; “O God, please le’ me get up and fight!”

A harsh growl stopped him. The grey intruder approached him with a rapid, sinuous movement of the tail. His jaws grinned hideously with long sharp

teeth displayed. The rage of hunger was in his eyes fixed steadily upon the sick man.

Antoine stared steadily into the glaring eyes of his wolfish rival, already crouching for the spring.

On a sudden, a strange exhilaration came over the man. He seemed drinking in the essence of life from the pitiless stare of his adversary. His great limbs, seeming devitalised but a moment before, now tingled to their extremities with a sudden surging of the wine of life. His eyes, which the fever had burned into the dulness of ashes, flamed suddenly again with the eager lust of fight.

He raised himself upon his haunches, beast-like, and with the lifting of a sneering lip that disclosed his grinding teeth, he gave a cry that was both a snarl and a sob. In that moment, these many centuries of artificial life were as a vanished dream. From the long-slumbering dust of the prehistoric cave-man came a giant spirit to steel the sinews of its far removed and weaker kin.

Antoine met the impetuous spring of the wolf with the downward blow of a fist, and sprang whining upon his momentarily worsted foe. Never before had he fought in all his bitter pariah life as now he fought for the possession of his last companion.

His antagonist was larger than Susette, the survivor of many moonlit battles to the death in the frozen, foodless wilderness of hills.

Antoine struggled not as a man; he was now merely the good, glorious, fighting beast—masterful, primi-

tive, the keeper of his own. Lacerated with the snapping of powerful jaws, bleeding from his face and hands, the man felt that he was winning. With a whining cry, less than half human, he succeeded in fixing his left hand upon the hairy throat, crushed the wolf down upon its back, and with prodigious strength, began pressing the fingers of his right hand in between the protruding lower ribs. He would tear them out! He would thrust his hand in among the vitals of his foe!

All the while Susette, whining and switching her tail, watched with glowing eyes the struggle of the males, and waited for the proof of the master.

At this juncture she arose with a nervous, threatening swaying of the head, approached the two cautiously, then hurled herself into the encounter. She leaped with a savage yelp upon him who had long been her master.

The man's grip relaxed. He fell back and threw out his arms in which once more the weakness of the fever came.

"Susette!" he gasped; "I was good to you; I——"

His voice was choked into a wheeze. Susette had gripped him by the throat, and the two were upon him.

She had gone back to the ways of her kind—and the man was an alien.

II

THE LOOK IN THE FACE

IT was after one of the Saturday night feasts at No-Teeth Lodge that I drew my old friend, Half-a-Day, to one side where the shadows were not broken by the firelight.

“Tell me another story, Half-a-Day,” I said.

He grunted and puffed at his pipe in silence.

“Have I not given much cow meat to the feast and did I not throw silver on the drums?”

“Ah,” he assented.

“Then I wish to hear a story.”

“You are my friend,” he began with majestic deliberation, speaking in his own tongue; “for we have eaten meat together from the same kettle and looked upon each other through the pipe smoke. It will therefore make me glad to tell you a story about buffalo meat——”

“Ah, about a hunt?”

“And a *me-zhinga* [girl]——”

“Oh, a love story!”

“And a man whom I wished to kill.”

“Good! And did you kill him?”

“My brother is like all his white brothers, who leap at things. Never will they wait. If I said yes or no, then would I have no story.”

“Then give me a puff at the pipe, Half-a-Day, and I will be patient.”

Half-a-Day gave me the pipe and began, with eyes staring through the fire and far away down the long trail that leads back to youth.

“Many winters and summers ago I was a young man; now I am slow when I walk and my head looks much to the ground. But I remember, and now again I am young for a little while. I can smell the fires in the evening that roared upward then, even tho’ they are cold these many moons and their ashes scattered. And I can see the face of Paezha [flower], the one daughter of Douba Mona, for my eyes are young too. And Douba Mona was a great man.

“Paezha was not so big as the other squaws, and could never be so big, because she was not made for building tepees and bringing wood and water. She was little and thin and good to see like some of your white sisters, and there was no face in the village of my people like her face. Her feet touched the ground with a light touch like a little wind from the south; her body bent easily like a willow; I think her eyes were like stars.”

I smiled here, because the simile has become so trite among us white lovers. But Half-a-Day saw me not; he looked down the long trail that leads back to youth, leading through and beyond the fire.

“And I looked upon her face until I could see nothing else—not the sunrise nor the sunset nor the moon and stars. Her face became a medicine face to

me; because I was a young man and it was good to see her. And also, I was a poor young man; my father had few ponies, and her father had as many as one could see with a big look.

“But I was strong and proud and in the long nights I dreamed of Paezha, till one day I said: ‘I will have her and I will fight all the braves in all the villages before I will give her up. Then afterwards I will get many ponies like her father.’

“So one evening when the meat boiled over the fires, I went down to the big spring and hid in the grass, for it was the habit of Paezha to bring cold water to her father in the evenings, carrying it in a little kettle no bigger than your head covering, for she was not big.

“And I lay waiting. I could not hear the bugs nor the running of the spring water nor the wind in the willows, because my heart sang so loud.

“And I heard a step—and it was Paezha. She leaned over the spring, and looked down; then there were two Paezhas, so my wish for her was doubled and had the strength of two wishes.

“I arose from the grass. She looked upon me and fear came into her eyes; for there was that in my face which wished to conquer, and I was very strong. Like the *tae-chuga* [antelope] she leaped and ran with wind-feet down the valley. I was without breath when I caught her, and I lifted her with arms too strong, for she cried.”

Half-a-Day reached toward me for the pipe and

puffed strongly. His eyes were masterful, with the world-old spirit of the conquering male in them.

“Then as I held her, I looked upon her face and saw what I had never seen before: a look in the face that was sad and weak and frightened, begging for pity. Only it was not all that; it was shining like the sun through a cloud, and it was stronger than I, for I became weak and could hold her no longer. A little while she looked with wide eyes upon me; and then I saw what makes the squaws break their backs carrying wood and water and *zhinga zhingas* [babies]; also what makes men fight and do great deeds that are not selfish.

“Then she ran from me and I fell upon my face and cried like a *zhinga zhinga* at the back of a squaw—I know not why.”

Half-a-Day puffed hard at his pipe, then sighing handed it to me.

“Have you seen that look in the face, White Brother?” he said, staring upon me with eyes that mastered me.

“I am very young,” I answered.

“But when you see it, it will make you old,” continued Half-a-Day; “for when I arose and went back to the village I was old and nothing was the same. From that time I could look into the eyes of the biggest brave without trembling, for I was a man and I had seen the look.

“And it was in the time when the sunflowers die, the time for the hunting of bison. So the whole tribe

made ready for the hunt. One morning we rode out of the village on the bison trail; and we were so many that the foremost were lost in the hills when the last left the village. And we all sang, but the ponies neighed at the lonesome lodges, for they were leaving home.

“ Many days we travelled toward the evenings, and there was song in me even when I did not sing; for always I rode near Paezha, who rode in a blanket swung on poles between two ponies, for she was the daughter of a rich man. And I spoke gentle words to her, and she smiled—because she had seen my weakness in the valley of the big spring. Also I picked flowers for her, and she took them.

“ But one day Black Dog rode on the other side of her and spoke soft words. And a strange look was on the face of Paezha, but not the look I had seen. So I drove away the bitterness of my heart and spoke good words to Black Dog. But he was sullen, and also he was better to look upon than I. I can say this now, for I have felt the winds of many winters.

“ Many sleeps we rode toward the places of the evening. The moon was thin and small and bent like a child’s bow when we started, and it hung low above the sunset. And as we travelled it grew bigger, ever farther toward the place of morning, until it was like a white sun. Then at last it came forth no more, but rested in its black tepee after its steep trail.

“ And all the while we strained our eyes from many lonesome hilltops, but saw no bison. Scarcer and

scarcer became the food, for the summer had been a summer of fighting; we had conquered and feasted much, hunted little.

“So it happened that we who were strong took less meat that the weaker might live until we found the bison. And all the time the strength of Paezha’s face grew upon me, so that I divided my meat with her. It made me sing to see her eat.

“One day she said to me: ‘Why do you sing, Half-a-Day, when the people are sad?’ And I said: ‘I sing because I am empty.’ And Black Dog, who rode upon the other side, he did not sing. So she said to him: ‘Why do you not sing, Black Dog? Is it because we do not find the bison?’ And Black Dog said: ‘I do not sing because I am empty.’

“All day I was afraid that Paezha had judged between us, seeing me so light of thought and deed.

“One evening we stopped for the night and there was not enough meat left to keep us three sleeps longer. The squaws did not sing as they pitched the tepees. They were empty, the braves were empty, and the *zhinga zhingas* whined like little baby wolves at their mothers’ backs, for the milk they drank was thin milk. No one spoke. The fires boomed up and made the hills sound as with the bellowing of bulls, and the sound mocked us. The dark came down; we sat about the fires but we did not speak. We groaned, for we were very empty, and we could not eat until we had slept. Once every sleep we ate, and we had eaten once.

"That night the wise old men gathered together in the tepee of the chiefs and sang medicine songs that Wakunda [God] might hear and see our suffering; then might he send us the bison.

"I heard the songs and I felt a great strength grow up out of my emptiness. Then I said: 'I will go to the fathers and they will send me in search of the bison; and I will find the bison for Paezha that she may not starve.' I had forgotten myself and my people. I knew only Paezha, for that day I had heard her moan, having nothing more to give.

"And I went to the big tepee. I stood amongst the fathers and lifted a strong voice in spite of my emptiness: 'Give me a swift pony and a little meat and I will find the bison!'

"And the old men sighed as they looked upon me. And Douba Mona, her father, being one of the wise men, said: 'I see a light in his eye and hear a strength in his voice. Give him the swift pony and the little meat. If he finds the bison, then shall he have Paezha, for well I see that there is something between them. Also he shall have many ponies; I have many.'

"And these words made me full as though I had sat at a feast.

"So the next morning I took the swift pony and the little meat and galloped toward the evening. The people did not take the trail that day, for toil makes hunger.

"Two sleeps I rode, singing songs and dreaming

dreams of Paezha. And on the evening of the third sunlight I stopped upon a hill, and turned my pony loose to feed. I was sick and weak because my emptiness had come back upon me and I had not yet found the bison. I fell upon my face and moaned, and my emptiness sent me to sleep.

“When I awoke, someone sat beside me—and it was Black Dog. He breathed soft words. ‘I have come to watch over Half-a-Day,’ he said, ‘because I am older and a bigger man.’

“I spoke not a word, but my heart was warm toward Black Dog, for my dreams of Paezha had made me kind.

“‘Well I know,’ he said, and his voice was soft as a woman’s; ‘well I know what Half-a-Day dreams about. And I have come to watch over him that his dream may come true.’

“Then being a young man and full of kindness, I told Black Dog of the look I had seen in the face of Paezha. And he bit his lips and made a sound far down in his throat that was not pleasant to hear. And I fell to sleep wondering much.

“When I awoke, the ponies were gone, the meat was gone, Black Dog was gone. I grew strong as a bear. I shrieked into the stillness! I shook my fists at the sun! I cursed Black Dog! I stumbled on over the hills and valleys, shouting, singing, hurling big words of little meaning into the yellow day.

“Before night came I found the body of a dead wolf, and I fell upon it like a crow. I tore its flesh

with my teeth. I called it Black Dog. I ate much. It smelled bad. I found a little stream and drank much. It was almost lost in the mud. I slept and dreamed of Paezha. I awoke, and it was day again. I found the dead wolf again. I ate. Then I was stronger and I went on into the empty yellow prairie.

“Toward evening I heard a thundering, yet saw no cloud. It was the dry time. Still it thundered, thundered—yet no cloud. I ran to the top of a hill and gazed.

“Bison! Bison! The prairie was full of bison, and they were feeding slowly toward the camp of my people.

“I turned, I ran! I did not make a sound, tho' I wished to cry out. I needed all my strength for running, for I had no pony. I ran, ran, ran. I fell, I got up, I fell. Night came; I walked. Morning came; still I walked. Night came; I stumbled. And in the morning I was creeping.

“I do not know when I reached the camp of my people, I remember only a shouting and a sudden moving of the tribe. And then, after many bad dreams, I was awake again and the people were feasting. They had found the bison.

“Then, when we were on the home trail, I learned of the treachery of Black Dog. He had told my people how he had found Half-a-Day dead upon the prairie, but was too weak to bring him back. And the people believed for a time. And Black Dog spoke

soft words to Paezha, brave words to Douba Mona, until I was almost forgotten.

"But now I was a great man among my people, and Black Dog could not raise his head, for he had seen hate in the people's eyes.

"And in the time of the first frosts we reached our village and Paezha became my squaw. Also I got the ponies."

Here Half-a-Day paused to fill his pipe.

"It is a good story, Half-a-Day," I said. Half-a-Day lit his pipe, stared long into the glow of the embers, for the fires had fallen, and sighed.

"I have not spoken yet," he said; "for one day in the time of the first snow, Paezha lay dead in my lodge, and my breast ached. Black Dog had killed her at the big spring. At the same place where I had first seen the look, there he killed her.

"I remember that I sat beside her two sleeps and cried like a *zhinga zhinga*. And my friends came to me, whispering bitter words into my ears. 'Kill Black Dog,' they said. And I said: 'Bring him here to me, and I will kill him; my legs will not carry me.'

"But the fathers of the council would not have it so. And when they had buried her on the hill above the village, I awoke as from a long sleep, a very long sleep, and I was full of hate. They kept me in my lodge. They would not let me kill. I wished to kill! I wished to tear him as I tore the stinking wolf with my teeth! *I wished to kill!*"

Half-a-Day had arisen to his feet, his fists clenched,

his eyes shining with a cold light. He made a tragic figure in the dull, blue glow of the embers.

"Come, Half-a-Day," I said, "it is long passed, and now it is only a story."

"It is more than a story!" he said. "I lived it. I wished to kill!"

He sat down again, and a softer light came into his eyes.

"And the time came," he went on with a weary voice, "when Black Dog should be cast forth from the tribe, according to the old custom. I said, 'I will follow Black Dog, and I will see him die.' And he was cast forth. I followed, and it was very cold. The snow whined under my feet, and I followed in the night.

"But Black Dog did not know I followed. I was ever near him like a shadow. I did not sleep; I watched Black Dog. I meant to see him die.

"In his first sleep I crept upon him. I stole his meat; I stole his weapons. Now he would die, and I would be there to see. I would laugh, I would sing while he died.

"In the cold, pale morning I lay huddled in a clump of sage and I saw him get up, look for his meat and weapons, then stagger away into the lonesome places of the snow. And I sang a low song to myself. The time would come when I would see Black Dog die. I did not feel the cold; I did not grow weary; I was never hungry. And in the evenings I was ever near enough to hear him groan as he wrapped himself

in his blankets. Often I crept up to him and looked upon his face in the light of the stars, and I saw my time coming, for his face was thinner and not so good to look upon as in the time when the sunflowers died.

“I could have killed him, but then he could not have heard me sing, he could not have heard me laugh. So I waited and followed and watched. I ate my meat raw that Black Dog might not see my fire. Also I watched to see that he found nothing to eat; and he found nothing.

“One day I lay upon the summit of a hill and saw him totter in the valley. Then I could be quiet no longer. I raised my voice and shouted: ‘Fall, Black Dog! Even so Half-a-Day fell when Black Dog stole his meat and his pony!’

“And I saw him get up and stare about, for I was hidden. Then his voice came up to me over the snow; it was a thin voice: ‘I know you, Half-a-Day! Come and kill me!’

“‘Half-a-Day never killed a sick man nor a squaw,’ I shouted, and then I laughed—a cold, bitter laugh. Then Black Dog shook his fists at the four corners of the sky and stumbled off into the hills, and I followed. Now my time was very near, for Black Dog felt my nearness and he knew that he would die and I would see him.

“And one evening my time came. Black Dog was in the valley by a frozen stream, and he fell upon his face, sending forth a thin cry as he fell—thin and ice-like. He did not get up. He lay very still.

“ I ran down to where he lay—and I laughed, laughed, laughed. I heard him groan. I rolled him over on his back and looked upon his face.

“ I wish I had not looked upon his face!

“ He opened his eyes and they were very dim and sunken. His face was sharp. I sat down beside him. I said, ‘ Now die, and I will sing about it.’

“ Then his face changed. It became a squaw’s face—*and it had the look!*—a look that was sad and weak and frightened and begging for pity. And it seemed to me that it was not the face of Black Dog any more. *It had the look!* I had seen it in the face of Paezha by the spring!

“ Now since I have many winters behind me, I wonder if it was not a coward’s face; but then it was not so. I grew soft. There was a great springtime in my breast. The ice was breaking up. I wrapped my blankets about him. I gave him meat. He stared at me and ate like a wolf. I spoke soft words. I made a fire from the brush that was on the frozen stream. I warmed him and he grew stronger. All night I watched him and in the morning I said: ‘ Take my bow and arrows, Black Dog; I wish to die. Go on and live.’ For I had lost the wish to kill; I only wished to die. And he said no word; but his eyes were changed.

“ I staggered away on the back trail. I had no meat, I had no blankets, I had no weapons. I meant to die.

“ But I did not die. When I lay down at night,

worn-out and half frozen, someone wrapped blankets about me and built a fire by me. In the mornings I found food beside me. And so it was for many sleeps until at last I came to the village of my people, broken, caring for nothing. And I was thin, my face was sharp, my eyes were sunken, my step was slow.

“And the people looked upon me with wonder, saying: ‘Half-a-Day has come back from killing Black Dog.’

“But the truth was different.”

When Half-a-Day had finished, he stared long into the fire without speaking.

“Do you think Black Dog was all a coward?” I asked at length. “Perhaps he only loved too much.”

“I do not know,” said Half-a-Day; “I only know sometimes I wish I had not looked upon his face.”

III

FEATHER FOR FEATHER

TUM-UM-UM, tum-um-um, went the drums beaten by the hands of the old men —too old for wars, but now grown momentarily youthful with the victory of the young men who were returning from battle.

Tum-um-um, tum-um-um! So sang the drums—great, glad buckskin drums, exultant beneath the staccato blows of the old men's drumsticks. Tum-um-um, tum-um-um! Now the women, dressed in their gayest garments of dyed buckskin, radiant in beads, with the spirit of song upon their painted faces, came forth in a long file from a lodge and approached the centre of the open space about which were grouped the mud lodges of the village.

There, in the centre, sat the old men. The drums were singing a glad song, in sullen tones, in this hour of victory, for a runner, breathless with his speed, had brought the good news when the sun was half-way down the sky, and now the slowly setting sun was blazing on the evening hills.

Soon the whole victorious band, fresh from their fight with the Sioux, would come over the hills like an eager, dusty wind, clamorous with glad tongues

and thunderous with the driven hoofs of captured ponies.

So the drums sang and the women came forth and circled about them, peering beneath hands raised browward, into the deepening shadows of the valley down which the band would sweep.

They swelled the song of victory, the song of welcome to the victors, and the look of welcome was already upon their faces as they searched the deepening shadows.

There came a rumble over the hills as of a hidden storm in time of drouth, thundering mockingly in the rainless air. The drummers lifted their sticks with trembling hands and listened—with one accord they all listened for the shouts and the hoof beats.

Now the faint treble of distant shouting pierced the growing rumble of the thunder. It was the braves! They were returning with much glory and many ponies. The drumsticks fell snarlingly upon the taut buckskin, but the sound seemed only a whisper, for the entire village was shouting with a tumult that made the grazing ponies snort upon the hillsides and gallop away with ears pricked wonderingly.

“They come! They come!”

The villagers thronged upon that side of the village that looked toward the hills from whence the thunder deepened. A dust cloud gathered behind the hills. It grew until it caught the horizontal sunlight and seemed a scintillating tower of victory. Suddenly the hill above the valley was thronged with

mounted braves, waving their weapons above their heads and shouting, and a sunlit cloud of glory seemed about them.

The band swept down the hillside and down the valley, and the dust cloud thickened under the impetuous hoofs that beat the parched and yellow prairie. When they drew near the opening in the circle of lodges, the foremost hurled his panting pony back upon its haunches and the others reared and halted behind, champing at the restraining thongs.

“A-ho!” shouted the foremost, holding his weapons above his head. “We come from the Sioux! We have many ponies and also scalp-locks! Sing! For we have fought a good fight and we are not ashamed!”

A great shout went up from the village, and the drums snarled. Slowly, majestically, the circle of women began moving about the drums, keeping time to the rhythmic beats with a sideward shuffling of their feet in the dust. In a monotonous minor key the singing of the women began—at first like the crooning of an Indian mother to a restless child when the camp fires burn blue, and all the braves are snoring in the dark.

Then it rose into the mournful wail of a wife looking upon a dead face—a wordless, eloquent song. Then, with a burst, it rose into a treble cry, and words became dimly recognisable amid the ecstasy.

“We come, we come, and we are not ashamed!” sang the women to the snarling of the drums. “Let

the fires roar and the bison meat be cooked, for we have fought, and now we wish to eat!

“Let the women dance and sing that we may be glad after our fighting! A-ho! A-ho! We travelled far—one sleep, two sleeps, three sleeps, but we slumbered not! We came upon our enemies. They were hidden in the grass like badgers. They were dressed in yellow grass that they might hide. We saw them and we shouted with joy, for we were not afraid! The enemy trembled like wolves who have come to the end of the ravine and the hunters follow behind!”

As the women sang, shuffling about the circle, the braves rode in single file into the enclosure of the village and formed a circle about the dance.

“I saw a big man among my enemies,” sang the women, for so their song ran. “He was strong as a bear and terrible as an elk. His head was proud with eagle feathers, for many men had he killed. I did not tremble when he rushed at me; I raised my club and struck him, and he fell with his eagle feathers. He whimpered like an old woman when she becomes a child again. He said, ‘I have many ponies for you, and my children will cry if I do not go back. Spare me!’ But behold! I have his scalp lock!”

“His scalp lock! His scalp lock!” shouted the braves, as the words of the song were drowned again in the minor drone that followed the snarl of the drums. And they waved scalp locks above their heads—the locks of the fallen Sioux.

Out of the droning the song of the women grew again. It became more ecstatic, running the gamut of human passion—from the shrill shriek of defiance to the mournful wail for those who had fallen in the battle. And then the shuffling stopped; the song died away into a drone and ceased, like the song of a locust at the end of a sultry evening. The drums snarled no more, a great silence fell, the sun had sunk beneath the hills.

Then, in the silence and the shadows of the evening, one came forth from among the circle of braves, and, with a slow, majestic bending of the knees, danced in a circle about the women and the drums, that began again as an accompaniment to the song that he would sing.

Round and round the circle he danced, improvising a song to the rhythm of the drums, in which he sang his prowess, and the whole village shouted when he reached the end of his song, for he told of a good fight and a strong arm, and he had been great in battle.

Then, amid the shouting, another came forth to dance and sing, for he too had done great things. It was White Cloud, and he was great among his people. Round and round the circle he danced to the tune of the drums, dodging imaginary arrows, leaping upon imaginary foes, striking huge blows at the heads of warriors hidden in the shadow.

“See!” he shouted in his song, and his voice was loud and masterful, for a murmur of praise had

passed among the people. "See! White Cloud brings the scalp lock of a chief. He took it alone with his strong hand. The scalp lock of a big Sioux chief! Who has done a greater deed than White Cloud? Then let the old men place the eagle feather in his hair that he may be known among his people."

Once again the dancing stopped and the drums ceased their droning. White Cloud approached the old men, who slowly placed the eagle feather in his hair.

But one among the assembled braves did not give his voice to the shout that ensued.

His gaze narrowed with hatred as he looked upon White Cloud, and his body trembled as a strong tree that stands alone in the path of a tempest.

Then as White Cloud strode proudly to the inner rim of the circle of braves, with the tall eagle feather in his hair, another came forth bearing with him his bow and his arrows. It was he who had found no voice in which to celebrate White Cloud's valour.

He was tall and sinewy, and he had the clear-cut, cruel face of a hawk, now dark with a darkness deeper than the shadow of the evening. It was Little Weasel.

Erect, quivering like a strong bow in the clutch of a mighty warrior, he walked into the open space, and the drums once more began their wailing. But Little Weasel raised one trembling hand and commanded silence.

“Fathers,” he said, and his voice was low, vibrant with the growl of a wounded beast in it, “Little Weasel needs no drums to help him fill the stillness.”

The people bent forward, hushed, because there was something deeper than shadow in the face of Little Weasel as he turned his hawk’s gaze upon the bowed head of White Cloud.

“Little Weasel has words to utter, but they are not song words nor dance words. Let the women and cowards sing and dance!”

Still the head of White Cloud was bowed, and Little Weasel laughed a strange laugh.

“Who took the scalplock of the big Sioux chief?” shouted Little Weasel. “I, Little Weasel, took it! One sleep, two sleeps, I kept it close beside me; for I am a young man and I wanted to hear the shouts of my people. But in the third sleep a great heaviness came upon me, and when I awoke my Sioux scalp lock had been stolen from me. Now I know the badger who crept upon me in my heaviness and stole my honour from me. Look! You have placed the eagle feather in his hair!”

In the hush that filled that shadowed place naught but the heavy breathing of the people was heard. Little Weasel fitted a feathered arrow to his bow.

“See!” he cried. “I do not cry about my stolen feather. I give another!”

The bow-thong twanged, the arrow sang, and lodged deep in White Cloud’s breast.

“Let White Cloud wear that feather in his breast

so that the black spirits will know him! For look! Already he is among them!"

White Cloud had fallen upon his face. Little Weasel dropped his bow upon the ground, and, raising his hands above his head, he shouted into the stillness: "Fathers, I have given feather for feather!"

Then a great cry broke from the assembled braves and the women shrieked. But Little Weasel shouldered his way through the throng and went to his lodge, laughing bitterly.

That evening the fires of the feast did not roar upward into the night. There was no song; there was no babble of glad voices; there was no bubbling of kettle nor scent of meat.

For a member of the tribe had been murdered by a tribesman, and the murderer, according to an ancient custom, would be driven forth that night from the circle of the lodges into the prairie. And the people sat speechless at the dark doors of their lodges awaiting the signal.

After a long and wordless waiting in the dark, the people saw the door-flap of the big council lodge swing open, and they held their breaths, for the time of the casting forth had come.

Through the hush of the starlit night came Little Weasel, pacing slowly about the circle of the village, and the fathers of the council, slow with age, followed behind.

Three times the outcast made the rounds, and when

he began the fourth and last circle (for four is a medicine number), the old men who followed raised their faces to the starlit sky and breathed these words into the quiet:

“Let the people look upon Little Weasel, our brother, for he has killed a brother and must suffer. Four times shall the bears bring forth their cubs; four times shall the lone goose fly; four times shall the frogs sing in the valleys; four times shall the sunflowers grow; and he must wander, wander. Then shall Little Weasel return and his deed shall be forgotten. *Wah-hoo-ha-a-a-a!*”

Then when Little Weasel came the fourth time to the opening in the circle of lodges, looking toward the place of sunrise, he saw one standing in the dark who held a pony by a thong. And Little Weasel leaped upon the pony, laughed a loud, unpleasant laugh, and urged it southward into the night.

Throughout the night the people in the village heard strange sounds. For at times somewhere in the darkness of the hills, something laughed a loud, unmirthful laugh.

“Do you hear it?” the people whispered. “It is a wolf. For sometimes in the lonesome nights they laugh so.” But the people muffled their ears in their blankets, for it is not good to hear a wolf laugh almost like a man.

All night long Little Weasel wandered upon the hills, holding his grazing pony and looking down upon the starlit village of his people. He laughed

loudly at times, for he was not one of those who sadden with trouble.

"How can I get revenge upon my people?" he asked himself. And as yet he could not answer.

The pale dawn found him sitting upon the hills. Then he arose and mounted his pony and the three went southward—the pony, the man, and the question.

A light wind blew upon his back.

"How can I get revenge upon my people?" he sang aloud in endless variation until his question wove itself into a song—a battle song, for Little Weasel had not eaten, and hunger feeds anger. But the light wind sighing at his back made no answer.

"I will go to the country of the Pawnees and make them angry with my people," he said to himself, and this seemed the answer to his question until the sun had reached its highest in the sky and the wind had fallen and the yellow prairie had become parched and bare.

In the afternoon he stopped in the glare of the sun and held one wet finger above his head that he might learn the source of the wind.

There was a faint breath from the south. As he stood it increased, coming in little puffs, hot and fitful and dry. Suddenly it came with a great puff and boomed in the arid gulches.

Little Weasel shouted with joy.

He had heard his answer in the booming of the sudden wind. He dismounted, and, with a flint and some dry grass, lit a little fire.

The great wind fed it and it grew. Then Little Weasel collected a bunch of grass, lit it and rapidly set fire to the dry prairie.

Long, yellow flames leaped up from the sun-cured buffalo-grass, howled in the wind that grew stronger and stronger, and raced northward toward the valley where the circled lodges of the Omahas lay.

“Now I will go back,” said Little Weasel, “and the fire shall go with me.” He kicked his pony in the ribs and pointed its head northward. The wave of flame preceded him, skimming the surface of the grass with great leaps, gaining strength and fleetness as the dry wind lashed it from behind.

“*Aha-ha-he-ha-ha-ha!*” sang Little Weasel, and the pony, straining its wiry limbs to keep pace with the yellow giant that ran before, wheezed and coughed an accompaniment to the song, for the ashes were in his nostrils.

Over hills, through valleys, across gulches the pony ran, with the wall of flame ever a strong man’s bow-shot ahead of him.

Now the Omahas, who had been deprived of their feast of victory the evening before, had made the feast fires roar upward throughout the village that day and much meat had been eaten.

Weary with much dancing and singing and heavy with meat, the evening twilight found them sleeping heavily. And the night deepened and still they slept.

But there was one upon whom the feast had laid but a light hand, and who awoke suddenly in the

night with a smell in his nostrils, a roaring in his ears, and a great light in his eyes. He marvelled, for the feast fires were dead in their ashes.

He arose, and when he reached the door of his lodge he gave a cry that woke the sleeping village and brought the people clamouring into the open air.

Half the earth and half the sky were aflame. The stars had fled before the great burning. Booming in the strong wind, a wave of flame was coming over the hills and reaching long, spiteful arms toward the village in the valley.

Spellbound, the people gazed. Then of a sudden a cry ran among them, for they had seen, through a momentary rift in the flame and smoke, high upon the eminence of a peaked, fire-blackened hill, a man standing upon a pony's back, with his arms above his head. He looked prodigiously big and seemed to ride upon a flood of fire.

Then the flames closed in, the smoke hid the peaked hill, and frantically the people fled from their village to a nearby creek, where they huddled in the stream, and where the loud flame passed over them, booming on into the north.

When the gray of morning fell upon the blackened prairie, the people returned to their village. But at the opening in the circle of lodges stood a mounted man. Both he and his pony were blackened as with fire. It was Little Weasel.

As his people drew near he raised a wheezing voice and said: "Behold Little Weasel, whom the

fire-spirits love! All day I rode across the hills, thinking of my people's unkindness. In the evening a great fire grew up about me. It was not a common fire; it was a medicine fire. It grew up about me and my pony, and lifted us like the waters of a flood. And I was frightened till I heard a voice that thundered, and it said: 'Little Weasel has been punished by a foolish people. The spirits of fire will take him back and his people will take him in again.' And lo! here I am, Little Weasel. I want my eagle feather."

And the people, believing many strange things, took him in with a great feasting.

And from that day they called him by another name—Paeda-Nu, the Fire-Man.

And he was great among his people.

IV

THE SCARS

MY friend, the old frontiersman, poked an extra supply of cobs into the stove, meditatively watched the sudden flame lick about the husks, then began this monologue after his usual manner:

Yes, I've got a nice place here—nice ranch. Didn't work for it either—lied for it!

Now, I'm not given much to that sort of thing, as you will grant; but when I see a place where a good manly twisting of the truth can sweeten matters up a bit, I'm not so scrupulous.

Back in the late fifties I was living in St. Louis, pretty nigh broke, for all I'd lived a hard, industrious life up and down the river. One day I got a note bearing the postmark of some California mining town, and it informed me that I had a considerable credit with a certain St. Louis bank. I never heard directly where the money came from, but I thought I knew. I bought this place with some of that money, you see. And there's a little story attached to this.

For a number of years I was employed by the American Fur Company as expressman. Every win-

ter I made the trip from St. Louis to Fort Pierre, a distance of about a thousand miles. Carried messages from headquarters to the posts and from the posts back to headquarters. From St. Louis to Pierre the trip was made on horseback, and from there up, other expressmen carried the mail on dog sleds.

Great days, those! Sometimes when I get to thinking over old times, I wonder if the railroads haven't taken some of the iron out of the blood of men.

In the winter of '50—that was the year the gold fever was raging, you know—I got to Pierre about the middle of February. When I had delivered the mail and was making ready to start south again with the returns, old Choteau, the factor of the post, called me into the hut he called his office, and made an unusual request of me. "We've got a half-breed here," said he, "who's got to be elevated. Understand? Killed a man in the most atrocious manner. He's due at a necktie party down at St. Louis about next spring, and I'd rather not keep him at the post; can you take him down?"

I was somewhat younger in those days, and ready for most anything new. Also, I had found the trail a little lonesome at times. Riding a preoccupied broncho through hundreds of miles of white silence, hearing the coyotes yelp, dodging Indians, and bucking blizzards weren't ever calculated to be social functions, you know. So I was glad to have com-

pany on the trail, even if it had to be the company of a criminal. Anyway, I had been so taught in the great rough school of primitive men, that I had not that loathing for a killer of his kind that is felt by this generation.

“Certainly,” said I to the factor. “Put him on a mule, and I’ll see him into the government corral at St. Louis.” So it was arranged that I should take the man to the authorities.

I did not hear his name spoken and I didn’t take the trouble to ask. It seemed to me that a man who was being shipped out with a tag on him reading “Nowhere,” had little use for a name. No one was apt to dispute his identity.

Well, they put him on a mule, handcuffed, with a chain to his ankles passed around the belly of the mule. He was, of course, unarmed, and I drove him on ahead of me to break trail. He was a powerfully built fellow, neither tall nor short, and close-knit. He had a face that was not so bad, showing the French and Indian strains in him plainly. When we had been riding along silently for several hours, I called to him to stop and rode up beside him.

I looked into his eyes, and that look satisfied me that I was safe in doing what I had thought of. His eyes were large and black and quiet.

“I am going to take the cussed irons off your legs and arms,” I said; “you can’t keep warm this way.” He watched me taking them off and said nothing. I threw the irons away. “Go on,” I said. And

he went, giving me a look that thanked me more than words could have done.

He had the eyes of a brave man. I was never much afraid of a brave man; it's the cowards you have to watch, you know.

All day we rode, saying nothing. In the evening we made a shelter with our blankets in the bend of a creek where the plum bushes were thick. The man was a good hand at the business, and seemed anxious to please me.

We cooked and ate supper, then rolled up in our blankets. I put my two six-shooters under my head for fear that I might have somehow misread the man's eyes.

When I awoke in the morning, he had breakfast cooked and the nags saddled. When we were eating I said: "Why didn't you take my horse and run away? I could never have caught you with the mule."

He searched me for a moment with his eyes.

"Because I'm not a coward," he said.

And all day we rode again in silence, until, toward evening, he set up a wild sort of a song—a *chanson* of his fathers, I suppose—in a voice that was strong but sweet.

"You sing!" said I.

Breaking off his song and turning about on his mule, he said quietly, as though he were discussing the best way to make biscuits when you haven't any soda: "Did you ever see a dead liar?"

"Perhaps," said I; "but none in particular."

"And that is why you never sing."

That was the last word that day. Up to this time the weather had been rather too warm for winter—an ominous sort of a warm, you know. A mist hung over the country, drifting with a light wind from the southeast. During the night the wind whipped into the northwest, and in the morning we had a genuine frank old blizzard howling around us; one of those fierce old boys that nobody cares to face. We had camped in a wooded nook on the south side of the river bluffs and were pretty well protected, so I decided to lay up there until things brightened up a bit.

The man, for I had not yet learned his name, which was not necessary, as the mail I carried attended to that, volunteered to gather wood; and so I lay in the tent near the fire that roared in front, smoking my pipe and swapping cusses with myself or account of the delay.

After a while the man came in with a big arm load of wood, whistling merrily. "Well, you beat 'em all," I said. "I say a man who can whistle like that on his last trip is a game one. What's your name and who are you? Here, want to smoke?"

I gave him my pipe. He took it and blew rings meditatively for a while. "Well," said he, "the name doesn't matter much, and I'm the fellow who's elected to be elevated!"

We both laughed strangely, and I began to open

my stock of yarns, truthful and otherwise, to relieve the tedium of the day. I had told a number of stories when the man seemed to brighten up all at once. His eyes became on a sudden unusually brilliant.

"I know a story that's a fact," said he. "It's about a friend of mine—one of the best friends I ever had, I reckon. At least he never went back on me. Shall I tell it?"

"Go ahead," said I.

And this is the story he told me:

"My friend's name is Narcisse. I knew him when he was just a little shaver. I knew his mother and his father. In fact I was, at one time, just like one of the family.

"Narcisse was a wild sort of a boy always, though I do think his heart was in the right place, as they say. Never betrayed a friend, never stole, and never knuckled to an enemy. But he was a wild boy and didn't stay at home much after he was in his first 'teens. Knocked about the world considerable, Narcisse did, and wound up out here in this God-forsaken end of creation. Worked on a cordelle gang, handled mackinaws, hammered pack mules, fought Indians, starved and feasted, froze and toasted, like all the others who come out here. Entered the fur trade as *engagé* of the Company, and was sent to a post up river.

"Now if there was a weak spot in Narcisse, it was his leaning toward womenfolks. None of your fooling, though! Narcisse loved just like he'd fight—

pretty serious, you know. When he said a thing, Narcisse he meant that; and when he wanted to do something real bad, he did that—O, spite of hell he did that! You know the breed? Well, that was Narcisse.

“There was an old French trader living at a post further up—old man Desjardins. He had a daughter—Paulette—by an Indian woman who died when the girl was just a baby, and the old man raised her somehow—God knows how—till she grew to be about the prettiest girl you’d see anywhere in a year’s tramp, being a good walker. Old man doted on the girl, and until she was full-grown there wasn’t anybody could come nigh enough to her to make a sweet grin effective. But once Narcisse and his friend, Jacques Baptiste, got snowed in there on one of their trips.

“Now them two, Jacques and Narcisse, was about the best friends you ever saw, I reckon. They never had any secrets from one another; and many’s the time they had split the last bit of grub on long winter trails, and made a feast of that little; because there isn’t any feast better than a little grub split between friends, is there?

“Now Paulette was a slender little creature with black eyes and lots of black hair. Lots of hair! That makes a woman fetching, don’t you think so? Well, Narcisse and Jacques sang old French songs during the blizzard, and kind of got into the old man’s heart like. Nothing like old-time songs to

fetch a man when he's got to that place where there isn't any way to look but back. So the old man made 'em welcome and said for 'em to come back when they could.

"On the trip from old man Desjardins' place to Pierre, them two friends talked pretty frank, like they always did. Both of 'em was in love, and neither of 'em was ashamed of it. Told each other so.

"When they camped the first night they talked it all over and Narcisse said: 'Jacques, we've always split even, but here's where we can't. It's for one of us all right, but one of us has to go without. How about this?'

"And Jacques puffed at his pipe a long time, and after a while he said: 'Let's agree that we'll always go up there together, and let her take her pick.' And Narcisse agreed; so that's the way they fixed it.

"Managed to drop in pretty often after that. But there wasn't any way of telling which was it. One visit she'd smile more at Jacques than at Narcisse, and they'd think it was settled; and then next time it was t'other way.

"It was a game, and both of 'em played it like a game. They were too good friends to slip a bower or ace up their sleeves. They let Paulette deal the hands and they played 'em the best they could, same as honest poker, you know. And all the time old man Desjardins looked on like the man that runs the game, a-raking in the ante, which was the singing

and the laughing they did and the things they brought up with 'em, for they never came empty-handed.

"Well, the next fall came; the game was still on and neither of 'em had stole a hand nor a chip that wasn't his. And along about the first of September the factor of Pierre sent the two friends on a trip to Benton. They went up on the last boat and were to drop down again in a maciknaw before the winter set in, after doing a little business for the Company.

"On the trip up Narcisse and Jacques had a quiet little game, which was poker. They didn't play for money—played for Paulette. Sort of made a jackpot out of the girl, and it took Jacks or better to open. One deal and a draw and the high hand could go to see the old man by himself and close the game that had hung on so long.

"Narcisse insisted on having Jacques deal.

"'Well,' said Jacques, after the draw, 'the jackpot's mine!'

"Narcisse throws down three aces. Jacques gasps a little gasp and throws his cards face up on the table, turns white and walks away. He had two pairs—kings and queens!

"There wasn't anything more said about it; but Jacques wasn't the same man at all. Acted like he was thinking, thinking all the time. Face got that peaked look that comes of too much thinking; eyes always looking a long ways off.

"How do I know this? W'y, Narcisse told me.

"Hurt Narcisse like everything to see this; but hadn't he won fair? Friends can split even on grub and follow the same trail for years, but there comes a time when they must smoke their last pipe together at the forks. But it's all part of the game and a man oughtn't to grumble if he don't get a pat hand, as long as the deal's fair.

"Narcisse and Jacques got to Benton, and when they got ready to start back, the river had frozen up, because the winter came down early that year. So they had another winter trail to follow together before they reached the forks. The factor at Benton gave 'em a couple of good dogs to carry their bedding and they started out afoot.

"Jacques didn't have much to say. With that peaked, set look on his face he went a-trudging on in the snow from sunup to sundown. Narcisse couldn't help feeling a little happy, because Paulette was the prettiest girl that ever haunted these parts since the river was dug. It wasn't any more than human, and he'd won fair.

"Well, they passed Union and they passed Les Mandanes and they passed Roubideaux', and then there was a long stretch of lonesome country ahead of 'em till they got to Brown's Landing, about two hundred miles above Pierre.

"One day it came on to blow and snow, and they made a camp in the bluff just like we did here. That's what reminded me of the story. Jacques made camp while Narcisse was chopping wood. He

cut down a dead cottonwood and when it came down, he tripped up in the deep snow and the tree fell on him. Broke his leg above the ankle. Well, there he was a couple hundred miles toward Nowhere in November with one leg.

"Pretty hard on Narcisse, wasn't it? But Jacques all at once began to be his old self again. Set the leg as good as he could and tied it up so it would stay in place, and joked and was kind to Narcisse.

"'Seems like old times, pard,' said Narcisse to Jacques. 'Danged if I wouldn't be glad it happened if we wasn't so far from somewhere; because we mustn't let the trail fork, old pard. I knew you'd be the same again when I was hard run.'

"And Jacques smiled and said there never was any hard feeling, he guessed. But the peaked look didn't go away, nor the far-away look in the eyes.

"When the weather cleared up, Jacques said he'd leave a plenty of wood and grub for Narcisse and he'd make a run for Brown's Landing and come back with dogs and a sled. And that made Narcisse's heart warm toward Jacques, because it was just like he was before the girl came between 'em.

"And Jacques left before sunup one morning, and when it came day Narcisse went to fix him some breakfast, and there was only enough grub left for five or six days. That scared him, because it was a long trip to Brown's and back, and he couldn't walk.

"But he didn't cuss Jacques. He just said to himself: 'He didn't go to take so much, and it was

dark when he left.' And then he just took the hand that was dealt him and began playing against a run of hard luck. The grub lasted only about a week, and close picking at that. Jacques had plenty of wood chopped up, and Narcisse sat all day by the fire with his leg aching and his stomach a-gnawing, a-looking down the white waste towards Brown's. And night 'd come and no dog sled. Then day 'd come and he'd begin looking, looking. And when the grub was all gone, he soaked up all the leather there was about him and sucked that. And then he'd begin looking, looking, looking into the white waste, till he got so's he could see dozens of dog sleds coming and vanishing, coming and vanishing.

"But he didn't cuss Jacques. He said: 'The poor devil's been killed like as not; he wouldn't go back on his pard.' And one day he felt he was getting too weak to watch much more, and so he set a pole in the snow with a strip of blanket tied to it; and that tuckered him out so's he couldn't hardly crawl back to shelter. And with the last strength he had, he dragged the wood that was left up close to him where he could reach it, because he knew that in another day he couldn't get up.

"And then he began forgetting everything 'most, and having bad dreams that scared him, all the time a-worrying about the fire like as if he was half asleep, and hearing dogs barking, and trying to get up.

"And then at last he didn't know anything, till he

was on a dog sled with the feel of hot soup in his belly. And when he came to, he said: 'I knowed you'd come, Jacques; it was hard sledding without the grub, though.'

"And then he found out it wasn't Jacques at all; only some Jesuit missionaries travelling from the North. They'd seen his signal of distress a-flying, and had come and got him.

"And still Narcisse didn't cuss Jacques. He said: 'Poor devil's got killed or something.'

"And by and by the Jesuits got him to Brown's Landing, and he laid up there till the last of December, getting so he could walk. There wasn't anybody at Brown's who had seen Jacques; and Narcisse's heart ached; he thought sure Jacques was dead.

"And when Narcisse got well, he borrowed a horse from the factor at Brown's and went south to Pierre. It was night when he got to the post. He rode up to the cabin where he and Jacques bached together, and tied his horse. There was a cheery light coming out of the windows, and that seemed odd, seeing that Jacques was likely dead somewheres up the trail. And what seemed stranger, there was someone singing inside, and every now and then a woman 'd laugh. God! man, did you ever hear a woman laughing when your heart had been aching for weeks?

"'Beats the devil!' Narcisse thought, 'how quick folks fill your place when you're dead!' Gave him a tight feeling in the throat to think how someone was laughing inside, and Jacques somewheres up trail

with the coyotes sniffing at him and the snow blowing over him all day and all night!

“Then Narcisse slips up quiet as could be to the window and peeps in. He falls back like someone had hit him hard in the face. But nobody had. All he saw inside was Paulette and Jacques!

“Narcisse leans against the cabin, dazed like, for quite a spell. Seemed like he couldn’t get it all through his head at once. Then he saw it all—the cards had been stacked on him. He should ’ve been dead and he wasn’t. That was the trouble.

“Didn’t cuss Jacques even then, Narcisse didn’t. Wasn’t mad—just ached in his chest like. And by and by he goes up to the window and taps on it with his fingers. And Jacques comes out into the star-light, whistling.

“When he runs into Narcisse a-tottering around the corner like a drunken man, he gasps and leans against the cabin, a-holding on to it and staring.

“‘Good God!’ he wheezes. ‘Good God!’

“‘Old pard,’ says Narcisse; and his voice was like it had smoke in it, ‘you win; I pass; mine’s a bob-tail flush; but you stacked the deck!’

“‘For Christ’s sake, Narcisse,’ whispers Jacques, ‘don’t let her see you! Don’t let her hear you! Come on!’

“And he takes down toward the river, a-walking like the devil was after him; but it wasn’t anybody but Narcisse, limping a little with the bad leg.

“And when they came to the river Jacques didn’t

seem to have anything to say but 'O, it's a devil of a mess! A hell of a mess!' Said it over and over like he was half crazy. And Narcisse said: 'Last fall I'd have killed the man who'd said this about you, Jacques. It isn't the girl so much, Jacques; but you and I have starved and frozen together many's the time, and we always split fair till now. It was hard sledding up there without the grub and with only one leg. You stole the cards on me this deal, Jacques; but I'm not going to call for a new deal. I'll play the hand.'

"Just that way Narcisse said it. And with Jacques muttering, 'O, it's a devil of a mess,' they came to an air hole where the black water was gurgling and chuckling.

"And all at once Jacques flared up and snarled: 'Why in hell didn't you die?' And slashing out with a long knife, he made a long gash in Narcisse's scalp, and gave him a shove toward the hole. But he didn't go in, Narcisse didn't. He's got that scar yet, but he's got a deeper one where nobody sees.

"And then Narcisse somehow forgot the long trails they'd tramped together and the starvings and the freezings together. Couldn't think of anything but the sting of the knife and the trickle of the blood. And the white starlight swam round him like water in a suck hole, and got red like blood, and buzzed and hummed. And he was a better man than Jacques —better fighter. And when the light quit swimming around and got white again and the stillness of the

frozen night came back, Narcisse found himself sobbing and turning his heel round and round in somebody's mouth. And it was Jacques.

"And what does Narcisse get?"

The man, after finishing his tale, took a handkerchief from his pocket, carefully placed it about his throat like a halter, threw his head to one side and simulated strangulation.

We didn't tell any more stories after that. When night came we rolled up in our blankets, after having made a rousing fire. I did not sleep much that night. The man did, however. He was the coolest I ever saw. Went to sleep like a child, knowing full well that he too had a noose awaiting him.

When I was sure that he was sound asleep, I got up and carefully took off his bearskin cap, which he had not removed night or day since we had been together.

I saw by the blue glow of the falling embers that which I had expected to see—a long, ugly gash running across his scalp. It was not yet quite healed.

In the morning, as the storm had died in the night, we saddled up. "You take the mule and go on ahead," I said; "I'll probably catch up with you by noon."

The man obeyed. I did not expect to catch up with him, but along about noon I overtook him.

"You seem determined to travel my way," I said.

He stared at me for some time, and then said

quietly: "I'm not a coward just because I'm going to hang."

And we rode on together.

The next morning when we had saddled up, I said: "Narcisse, here is one of my six-shooters and some ammunition. There is the grub. If you travel west far enough, you will come at last to the gold country. Ever think of going to the gold country?"

The man gasped and placed his hand to his head. "When did I have my cap off?" said he.

"You have a good mule there," continued I, evading his question. "You have grub, a gun and ammunition. Why don't you go west?"

"Why are you saying that?" he said.

"Because," I answered, "because I have seen both scars!"

A light came into his eyes.

"And you?" he questioned.

"I?" said I; "well I, while conducting a prisoner southward, was attacked by Indians. The prisoner was killed while defending me with unusual bravery. I lost all my grub, one gun, some ammunition and a mule. I barely escaped with my life, and rode like the very devil to get to the next post. *Go!*"

I pointed west. The man slowly fastened the grub sack on his mule, mounted, gave me a look which I have never forgotten, and rode west.

I have never seen him since. As for me, I got into the next post that evening with a worn-out horse and a tale of calamity.

V

THE FADING OF SHADOW FLOWER

HE was only a timid little Omaha maiden with a pair of pensive eyes, dark like the thunder clouds, and like them, fraught with a potential fire that seemed ever about to spend its fury in the weakness of tears. She passed her childhood hours beside the singing streams and in the lonesome places where the silence lingered. The sunrise and the sunset found her where the wild flowers clustered, or where the noises of the nesting birds disturbed the stillness of the thickets. For hers was a timorous soul, and the dumb kindness of the green things was sweet to her.

So, as she grew in this wise toward that mysterious time when the immaturity of the girl bursts into the magic of the woman, her people said: "She talks with the things that talk not; she plays with the wind that sleeps and moans in the shadowy place." And that is why they named her Shadow Flower.

In the long, mysterious nights of the winter, Shadow Flower wept with fear at the mournful cry of the coyotes, and often through the droning days of the summer did the harsh warning of the startled rattlesnake send her trembling in terror to her

mother's breast. Yet, huddled close to the group about the evening fire, she loved to listen to the warriors' tales of the strong arm and the fierce heart; and her eyes glowed with an unwonted light as her kinsmen recounted the wild swoop of the ambushed foe or the silent pursuit, swift and relentless.

All the glowing ideals of manly prowess that her maiden heart had conjured, were centred in the person of the fearless brave, Big Axe; for had he not the eagle glance that went to the heart of an enemy like an arrow? Was not his the shaggy head of the buffalo bull that strikes with fear the boldest hunter? The breath of his sinewy breast was like a whirlwind when the battle cry awakened in his throat! There was no arm in all the circled tepees that could hurl a tomahawk so straight and far; and none that could heave above the anger of the battle a war club more ponderous!

"Ah," she would say to herself, while wandering alone with her musings, "Big Axe is so great a man!"

When a band of warriors rode out of the village, bent upon some petty conquest somewhere beyond the blue hills that undulated the horizon with their summits, Shadow Flower would become very lonely, and she would stand for long hours upon some larger hill, scanning the dim sky line for the returning warriors; for where the battle was, there was Big Axe. And when at last she would catch sight of the returning band, shouting with the great joy

of a battle won, how proudly she stared, and with what a light in her eyes, at her graceful warrior astride his swift pony! How anxiously would she search the headdress of her brave for the fresh eagle feather that should speak of some late deed done by the strong arm—her strong arm!

Yet her timorous little soul alone knew of the great overflowing passion that she treasured for Big Axe; unless, perhaps, the birds and the green things understood her, for hers was a passion that little words could not carry.

Thus did the frail flower long for the golden kisses of the sun!

There was war between the Omaha and Ponca tribes. So it happened one morning, in the time when the deer tear the earth with their horns, that Shadow Flower, hunting late blossoms upon the sere hills where the young Dawn danced, heard below her the impatient stamp of ponies, and beheld the mounting of braves, for Big Axe was leading a party of a hundred warriors against the enemy.

The purple spikes of the ironweed and the yellow plumes of the golden-rod dropped from her fingers as she gazed upon the sight below her. What a sight! It was as the marshalling of the incarnate Winds from the circle of the heavens. Out of the dust cloud that arose from the dry earth where four hundred nervous hoofs fretted with impatience beneath the restraining thongs, she caught the dazzle of the sleek and vari-coloured hides of the ponies;

some white with the brilliance of the summer sun when it glares upon the false lakes of alkali; some spotted and wiry as the wild cat; some tawny as the mountain lion; some black like the midnight when the storm clouds fly.

Their gaunt flanks were heaving with the joy of speed and power. Their nostrils were distent with the influx of prairie winds that know no restraining hand save that of the great invisible Master. They snorted and reared as if about to plunge in a wild heat down the winds. Their neighing was the shout of the tempest in the rocks, and their gusty manes were as clouds that tatter in the storm.

And amid this *mélée* of dust and noise and dazzle trembled the gaudy headdresses of the warriors, bright with the painted wing feathers of the eagle and the hawk.

Now a shout drowns the neighing and the snorting. A hundred braves leap to the backs of the plunging ponies. The dust cloud thickens and sweeps down the valley like a whirlwind. A far glint of brandished weapons; a dying shout; the band swoops about the base of a hill. Then the sultry day drones and drowses on the prairie. The grasshopper breaks the slumber of the stillness with his snapping noise; a lone hawk skirts the ground with slow, circling flight. But Shadow Flower stands and stares beneath a shading hand into the brilliance where the warriors vanished. Her ears hear not the snarl and hum of the drowsy bugs, nor

the shrill chatter of the sly gopher as it rears its striped body from the grass and peers about. She sees not the circling hawk and scarcely does the glitter of the yellow grass hurt her eyes. For her ears are filled with the shout that has died, and in her eyes a sinewy, masterful brave urges a black pony down the valley.

After a while her hand dropped from her eyes, and catching sight of the circling hawk, she cried: "O you who are so keen of eye, tell me, can you not see into the heart of Muzape Tunga [Big Axe]? O you who are so keen of thought, tell me, does he think of Pazha Hu [Shadow Flower]?"

But the hawk circled far away and the day droned on.

Among the hills, hidden from one who looked and saw not, the war party rode on with the noses of its ponies to that portion of the sky from which the red sun of summer springs, for in that direction lay the village of the Poncas, perched upon the yellow bluffs of the great muddy river.

On the evening of the second day the air grew soft with the scent of flowing waters, and the Omahas, checking their ponies upon the brow of a hill, beheld to their right the swirling stream, red with the last light of the day; and before them, across a deep hollow, the village of the Poncas, upon the summit of a bluff.

But while their eyes wandered over the misty stretches of the river, a wild shout startled the calm

of the scene, while from the village on the opposite summit a line of mounted warriors issued, taking the precipitous hillside at a brisk gallop.

The sudden shout and the beat of flying hoofs hurled the weary ponies of the Omahas back upon their haunches. Yet scarcely had the echoes of the shout cried their last among the distant bluffs, when a hundred Omaha bow thongs twanged and a hundred arrows shrieked their shrill death-song in the quiet evening air. A second and a third flight of arrows, and the rushing Poncas were thrown into confusion. Those in the rear were thrown by the floundering bodies of the wounded ponies in the front, the fury of their momentum hurling them pellmell into the valley below. Then the Omahas swept down the valley, as the eagle sweeps, with the battle cry upon their lips, and the remnant of the attacking Poncas turned and fled up the steep hillside to their village.

The village of the Poncas, in addition to its strong position, was further fortified by stockades, constructed of saplings driven into the ground with their tops sharpened. The fugitives having gained the protection of this barrier, were safe from further pursuit, and emboldened by their protection, they hurled such a flight of arrows into the ranks of the enraged Omahas that the latter were obliged to withdraw beyond arrow flight, contenting themselves with taunting their besieged foes by displaying the dripping scalps of the fallen.

Now the influence of the fading evening cooled the anger and hushed the shouting. From the height whither the assaulting band withdrew to camp, one could hurl the triumphant gaze unnumbered bowshots westward, athwart the brown hills that seemed to have been stricken motionless in liquid turbulence by the enchantment of the sunset, marvellous with the pomp of streamers, violet, purple, saffron, sanguine, dun!

Far up the river the blue haze of the sky-fringed woodland blended into the purple shadow beneath the contrasting yellow of the bluffs, that looked down into the smooth waters, upon their own scarred and wrinkled images crowned with golden crowns by the last scant sunlight. The cottonwoods placed their long shadows like soothing fingers on the muddy madness of the central stream. The Night awakened in the east and stretched its long black arms into the west, and the glory vanished. The distant woodland and the bluffs grew into indistinguishable masses. The river became a faint film above a lower concave of dawning stars. The camp fires in the village reared long towers of light into the darkness, then fell back into a sleepy glow.

One dreaming out a sunset on the prairie cannot wonder at the exquisite hyperbole of the Omaha language; that tongue nurtured amid marvellous possibilities of fury and calm, of beauty and terror, all within the sight-tiring circle of stupendous distance.

The dawn came, and by the first light the Poncas

beheld their enemies camped across the valley. Upon one side the bluff fell sheer to the river; upon the other lingered a cruel and patient foe. So it happened that after many days, moans of suffering arose from the lodges on the bluff; and the Omahas laughed in their tepees, for the sound of an enemy's wailing is sweet. The sweltering suns of the prairie September beat upon the bare summit where the village pined, and the lips of the Poncas burned with thirst, while their eyes drank of the copious floods far below them.

So it chanced one day, when a cry went up through the village: "Our children are dying of thirst; let us beg mercy of our enemies!" that an unarmed brave passed out of the village and across the valley toward the camp of his foes. With tottering step he approached the tepee before which Big Axe waited. His lips were swollen and cracked; his eyes were bleared and sunken, yet they glared as the eyes of a wolf from the darkness of a cavern.

In a hoarse, inarticulate whisper he spoke to the chief: "Pity my people, for they are dying of thirst!"

There was lightning in the eyes of Muzape Tunga. "Badger!" he hissed; and he struck the suppliant down before him.

The sun burned down the glaring blue of the west. A continuous wail arose from the suffering village like the cry of pines in a gentle wind; while from the tepees of the besiegers came the sound of merry

laughter that mocked like the babble of inaccessible waters.

But when the red sun touched the tops of the far hills, another form left the enclosure of the village and took its way down the hillside. As it came nearer, a hush of awe fell upon the Omahas. The form was that of a squaw! With an unfaltering movement she approached, seeming to hover through the mist that arose from the valley. Slowly she climbed the hillside. Not a sound passed the lips of the beholders. They seemed the figures of one dream gazing at the central idea of another. The form emerged from the mist and stood, swathed in the chromatic radiance of the evening before the motionless figure of Muzape Tunga. The eyes of the woman and the chief met in unwavering stare. Had the glance of the former become vocal, it would have been a song with the softness of the mother's lullaby, but with a meaning terrible as the battle cry of a brave.

With a langorous movement the woman raised her arms, thus allowing the many-coloured skin that hung about her shoulders to slip to the ground, exposing all the dumb eloquence of her brown breasts. Out of the silence her voice broke like the voice of a sudden wind that rises in the night.

“Nunda Nu [Man-Heart] fears not Muzape Tunga!”

The chief saw the lithe young form, heard the soft, caressing voice and shivered with great passion.

A swift smile crossed the face of the young woman, soft as a last ray of sunlight on a hill. Again the voice grew out of the hush.

"The heart of Muzape Tunga is strong like his arm and kind like his eye; he will spare my people."

The chief's great breast heaved with the pleasure of his eye and ear. "Nunda Nu has the heart of a man and the eye of a woman," he said; "her voice is soft like the song of a forest stream; Muzape Tunga spares her people."

Nunda Nu turned her face to her village and made a signal with her uplifted hands. Soon an unarmed Ponca, manifestly a chief by his garments, was seen taking his way down the hillside.

"Come!" said Nunda Nu, turning to Big Axe; "my father bears the pipe of peace; let us meet him in the valley."

Without a word the chief followed the young woman, while his warriors stared after in wonderment. In the valley, midway between the village and the camp, the chiefs met. Then both sitting cross-legged upon the grass, the Ponca lit the pipe of peace, and having puffed silently for a while, handed it to his conqueror. The sweet smoke of the red willow arose slowly over the silent three, and Big Axe stared abstractedly into the mounting vapour. The evening grew old. The sunlight left the summits of the hills and the shadows deepened. Still Big Axe did not speak, but gazed with wide

eyes into the ascending cloud of smoke. The heart of the terrible warrior had grown tender; a light softer than the twilight was in his eye. It seemed that he could hear the slumberous, singing voice of a squaw and the prattle of children about the door of his lodge. There were pictures for him in the rising smoke.

Suddenly he took the pipe from his mouth and returned it to the Ponca chief.

"We will bury the tomahawk," he said; "our ponies shall sweat no more in the battle, but in the paths of the bison. No more shall our faces be cruel with warpaint."

Again there was silence but for the rhythmic puffing of the Ponca's pipe. Again Muzape Tunga spoke, and his voice was sonorous with passion.

"The eyes of Nunda Nu are deep and dark as a mountain lake; her voice is a song that the slow winds sing in the willows. Give me Nunda Nu that my lodge may be filled with laughter; give her to Muzape Tunga that peace may be everlasting between us!"

There was a silence. The Ponca forgot his pipe; he puffed deliberately and at long intervals. The ascending smoke dwindled to a thin grey thread. With steadfast gaze the smoker looked before him into the darkness, for his thoughts were deep.

At length he laid the pipe upon the grass and arose to his feet, extending his hand to Big Axe. His voice was tremulous as he spoke.

"Muzape Tunga asks a great thing of his conquered brother; had he asked for a hundred ponies, with feet fleet as the winds in winter, his brother would have laughed at the little gift. Nunda Nu is my life; I give my life to my brother."

Already the night had spread into the west and the darkness hid their parting.

Some days afterward at sunset, an Omaha maiden stood upon a hill near her village. With hand at brow she peered into the blue distance. Suddenly a cry of delight trembled on her lips. A cloud of dust had grown far away upon the verge of a hill to the northeast, slowly resolving itself into a long line of warriors approaching at a gallop. The column drew nearer. The face of the watching maiden grew darker with anxiety, as a brilliant cloud darkens when the twilight fails. She beheld the masterful form of Big Axe mounted upon a black pony, riding in advance of the band; yet her face darkened. Her brows lowered with the strain of her intense gaze. Was it a squaw that rode upon a pony white as a summer cloud beside her warrior?

A shout went up from the village below. The speed of the ponies was increased to a fast gallop; the band swept up the valley. A strange low cry fell from the lips of the maiden; a stifled cry like that of a sleeping brave who feels the knife of the treacherous foeman at his heart.

In the village was the sound of many glad voices;

but in the darkness of the hill above, a frail form buried its face in the dry bunch grass and uttered a moan that no one heard.

The autumn passed: the cold winds came down from the north, shaking the snow from their black wings, and the people of the village began to look upon Shadow Flower with awe. For never a word had she spoken to anyone since the returning of the band in the fall. With a dull light in her eyes she wandered about muttering to herself: "It was summer when they left; now the prairie is so cold and white, so cold and white."

Absent-mindedly she would dwell upon the bitter words, gazing beneath an arched hand into the cold, white glare of the horizon. Then her eyes, at times, would blaze with gladness. "Shonga saba! Shonga saba!" (a black pony) she would cry ecstatically; and for one intense moment her frail form would be erect and quivering with joy. Then the light in her eye would fade as the fires fade in a camp that is deserted; a cry of anguish would fall from her lips, her hand would drop lifelessly from her brow. "No," she would sigh languidly; "no, it is only a cloud! O, the prairie is so cold and white, so cold and white!"

And the old people shook their heads and whispered to each other: "The soul of Pazha Hu has followed the summer, for her soul loved the flowers; can you not hear her body crying for her soul?"

When the warm winds came again and the hills were green, the crying of a young child was heard in the lodge of Muzape Tunga. The simple heart of the stern warrior throbbed with gladness as a cold seed throbs with the blowing of the south wind.

But the sound of the infant's voice brought no summer to the heart of Nunda Nu. The touch of its little brown hands stung her breasts, and as she looked upon its face, placid or expressive as its dreams took form or slept, a cold shudder ran through her veins as when one gazes on a snake, for it was the child of an enemy.

All through the long winter a slow hate had sapped the kindness from the heart of the future mother; and when she felt the new life throbbing into form, her thoughts grew bitter. So now the unforgotten moaning of the children of her people, dying with thirst upon the barren summit, was loud enough to drown the prattle of her enemy's child, which should have wrought enchantment in her blood.

One night a noiseless shadow passed among the tepees hushed in slumber beneath the moonlight. It crept up to the tepee of Muzape Tunga and crouched beside it in an attitude of listening. The bugs chirped and hummed, the frogs croaked, the wolves howled far away; save these and a sleeper's heavy breathing, there was silence.

Suddenly there was a faint sound as of someone

moving in the tepee; the shadow outside arose and the moonlight fell upon its haggard face, the face of Shadow Flower. She placed her eye to a small opening in the skins that covered the poles. Now she would gaze upon the child of Muzape Tunga!

Through the opening at the top of the tepee the moonlight entered with intense brilliance and fell upon three faces. One was the face of her once sweet dream and the face that trembled through the visions of her madness, Muzape Tunga's. One was the beautiful, cruel face of her who came upon a pony white as a summer cloud that autumn evening when the sunlight left the prairie. One was a face that she had not seen before, yet her poor heart ached as she looked upon it. It was the face of his child, her child. Ah, it should have been the child of Shadow Flower, she thought, and her brain reeled with sudden madness.

As she looked, the woman in the tepee raised herself upon her elbow. She gazed upon the peaceful face of Big Axe. The moon lit up her features in clear relief. Her eyes were terrible with hate; the lids drawn closely about them until they had the small beady appearance of the snake's. Her lips were drawn closely cross her white teeth in a cold grin. Her form trembled as with a chill, yet the night was warm. Then she arose, and with a noiseless step, sought for something that hung upon the side of the tepee. She returned clutching a tomahawk. The light caught her whole form, making it

stand out, clear-cut like a statue, the statue of a prairie Judith.

Then she bent over the sleeping Muzape Tunga for one moment. There was a dull sound as the weapon entered the sleeper's skull; but more than this there was no sound, no groan. And the one who stood like a shadow without the tepee was stricken dumb with fright.

The woman within turned to the sleeping child and raised the dripping tomahawk; but her arm seemed to freeze in act to strike, and the blow did not fall. A strange soft light crept over the face of the woman. She lowered her arm and laid the weapon aside. Then with the step of a wild-cat she crept to the entrance of the tepee and, gazing cautiously about for a moment, slipped silently into the haze of the moonlight, and was engulfed in the darkness of the valley.

As the dim outline of the fleeing squaw mixed itself with the uncertain haze and vanished, a great happiness leaped into the stagnant veins of Shadow Flower, and her blood rushed like a stream when the ice melts with the breath of the south wind.

Even the thought that Big Axe lay dead within the tepee did not quell her happiness, for she said to herself: "Now Pazha Hu shall have her warrior; he shall be all hers."

She crept into the tepee and, kneeling, put her lips to the chilling lips of Big Axe. He did not breathe. She placed her arms about his body, her face against

his breast, yet he did not move. He lay quietly with the intense moonlight upon his face. She did not sob, she was almost happy; for did she not at last possess that for which she had pined?

Her musings were broken by the crying of the child. She took it in her arms and held it to her breast, humming a low lullaby, half-persuaded that the child was her own. But the child was frightened by the strange voice and cried piteously. Then Shadow Flower thought, "It cries for its father, yet its father has gone." "Hush!" she said to the child; "we will go and find the soul of Muzape Tunga; it cannot be far away."

She wrapped a blanket about the infant, muffling its cries, and tied it about her shoulders. Then she went silently through the village and out into the open prairie, weird with the blue haze of the moon and the lonesome cries of the wolves.

A rabbit hopped past and stopped near her as if gazing at the maiden.

"O Rabbit!" cried Shadow Flower, "tell me, have you seen the soul of Muzape Tunga?"

The rabbit, awed by the strangeness of the voice, moved its long ears; then it hopped away into the shades. The maiden followed and was swallowed in the moonlit mist.

When the sun looked into the village, the women were stricken with terror and the men with anger. The wise people shook their heads by which to

say: "Ah, yes; we thought such things of Nunda Nu."

The days passed; the moons came and went; yet Shadow Flower did not return. There was a common thought concerning her disappearance which was never spoken aloud; but when the fires burned low and the night grew late, it was often whispered with awe:

"She has gone in search of her soul; it fled last year with the summer."

VI

THE ART OF HATE

MANY tales have been told of noble sacrifice for love, and I have seen such in my time; but I have in mind an instance in which a man reached a sublime height through the least exalted of human passions—hate.

There are some who argue that love is born at first sight. However that be, I am certain that it is often thus with hate. I have seen men in my time the first sight of whom was an insult to me—sudden, stinging like a slap on the cheek. It is a strange thing, and I have never heard it explained satisfactorily. Sometimes in my own case I have attributed it to even so slight a thing as a certain turn of the nose, a curve of the lip, a droop of the eye. And again I have felt that it was due to nothing visible about the man, but rather to some subtle emanation from the very soul of him, that maddened me as though I had inhaled the fumes of some devilish drug. Have you ever felt this?

Well, I am telling you about Zephyr Recontre.

He was a little, wiry half-breed, with a French father and a woman of the Blackfeet tribe for a mother. Quite a promising combination, if you think it over! I came across him 'way up at Fort Union

in the early '30's, when I was in charge of a keel boat of the American Fur Company. He was employed at the Fort as interpreter, being a fluent speaker of several Indian tongues as well as English and French.

His forehead was a narrow strip of brown between his wiry black hair and the continuous streak of black that was his eyebrows. His eyes were large and black and quiet. His cheek bones were prominent and his jaw was so heavy as to throw his whole face out of balance, as you might say. The face of a stayer, you know. Never said much except as his duties demanded, and then he went straight to the point with a quiet directness that left little need for a question.

Superb little animal he was, too; had the maximum strength with the minimum weight, and a cool head to run it with. I never saw him impelled by sudden anger except once, and that is where the story begins.

In the spring of '39 I took charge of the steam-boat *Yellowstone*, as captain. We were loaded with supplies for the American Fur Company's posts on the upper Missouri, and carried a number of *engagés* of the Company, and a certain Frenchman, Jules Latour, who had been appointed *bourgeois* of the old Fort Union, and was going up to take charge.

If there ever was an emperor in this country it was J. J. Astor, the head of the Company at that time,

and his empire was spread pretty much all over the white space on the map of the West as it stood then. The *bourgeois*, masters of the trading posts, were the proconsuls, and they acted the part.

The *engagés*, humble servants of the empire, were as dogs about the feet of these Western princes, who stalked through their provinces, mountain-high in aristocratic aloofness.

Latour outpriced princeliness. He felt his dignity and dressed it; his presence on the boat was like a continual blowing of trumpets going before a conqueror. A capital "I" swaggering in broadcloth—that was Latour!

Recontre was going back with us, having dropped down to St. Louis the fall before on Company business. I happened to be near when master and man first met on the forward deck. They stared upon each other for only a moment; but there were years of hate condensed in that bit of time, the master casting a contemptuous glance from beneath lids scornfully drooped, and the servant meeting this with a sudden glare of black fire.

Not a word was passed; Recentre made no sign of obeisance, passing on with a sullen swing, his jaws set firmly, his eyes brilliant as with a smouldering fire blown by a gusty wind into a baleful glow.

It was a plain case of hate at first sight. A week later, after we had passed St. Mary's, I was standing on the hurricane deck, gazing downstream where the colours of a quiet sunset swept the waters. I

heard an angry snarl below me, and looking down, I saw Recontre lift the struggling Latour in his arms and hurl him into the river.

I immediately stopped the boat and ordered a crew to man the yawl and rescue Latour, at the same time having Recontre seized.

Latour came aboard coughing and spitting, a most ludicrous object. But to my surprise, he immediately commanded that Recontre should be released. I wondered much at this at the time; but ten years later I had a talk with Recontre, which threw some light on the subject. He was leaving the country, and, as we had become close friends, he did not hesitate to tell me what he had kept a close secret for years.

We were taking a friendly glass together at a St. Louis bar, when I purposely brought up the name of Jules Latour, who had starved to death some years before in a mackinaw boat that got caught in the ice far up the river. I had heard stories of how Recontre, who was with Latour on the trip, had shown a faithfulness to his master equalled only by the faithfulness of a dog to a man. This had always seemed strange to me, and so I brought up Jules Latour.

At the sound of the name I saw the black fire grow up in my companion's eyes, just as I had seen it ten years before on the forward deck of the *Yellowstone*.

"You got that story, too, did you?" he said dreamily, staring straight ahead of him as into a

great distance. "Well, it's all over now, and for the first time, I am going to tell the truth about the death of Latour and my great faithfulness. When I first saw that man, I felt as though he had struck me between the eyes with his white fist. I hated him as I had never hated before, and as I hope never to hate again. It hurts to hate; it eats into a man like some incurable blood disease.

"You saw me throw him into the water. I can hardly explain why I did that; only, the man spoke to me in a way that insulted me more than if he had blackguarded my mother. It wasn't in the words, for I have forgotten what he said.

"We hated each other. I knew how much I hated, but I did not know how great was his hate until he smilingly ordered my release. I knew then that his hate was a great hate—stronger than love can be. And also I knew that this hate would grow until one of us was killed. And it did."

"What!" said I; "did *you* kill Latour?"

Recontre smiled one of his enigmatic smiles and said quietly: "*Nature* killed Latour; *I* merely helped *Nature*!"

And then he laughed softly, while the black fire grew again in his eyes.

Recontre led the way to a table in the back of the room and we sat down, when he began talking rapidly, never hesitating in his story, and seeming, at times, wholly unconscious of my presence.

"When we arrived at Fort Union," said he, "no

one could have guessed the hate that we nursed for each other. Being a new man in the country, Latour consulted me upon many phases of the business, and we were much together. The whole post considered me a most favoured person; little knowing, as I did, that hate can bind two persons as closely as love.

“ My hatred for the man made his a most fascinating personality to me; and I often found him studying my face with a diabolical fondness.

“ Latour heaped favours upon me, and I received them with a strange gladness of heart that even now I cannot explain. One day in November he sent for me to come to his office. I found him in a mood seemingly most agreeable. His face beamed with a light that any other would have taken for kindness. I saw in it only the ecstatic anticipation of triumph. And when he spoke I knew that I was right.

“ ‘ My dear Recontre,’ said he, ‘ it seems that I am forced to fall back upon you for everything. I have a difficult task on hand, and you are the one man to perform it; I know of no other so peculiarly fitted for it. I shall carefully lay before you the dangers of the mission I have in mind, leaving you free to consent or refuse just as you see fit. Perhaps the undertaking is impossible. It may be that no man is sufficiently equipped with strength and daring to do what I wish. You shall decide.’

“ You see he imagined that he was wheedling me through my vanity. He then stated that he wished

to open trade with the Blackfeet tribe. He drew strongly upon his imagination to explain the great dangers in store for him who should undertake the task. The Blackfeet were at that time deadly enemies of the whites. They had killed and mutilated a number of traders. I would of course stand a poor chance of coming back alive. He was convinced of that.

“‘Will you go, Recontre?’ said he, staring steadily into my eyes.

“I was dumbfounded at the audacity of the man. I saw the light of doubt wavering in his eyes; but I did not wish to flinch before my enemy.

“‘Certainly,’ said I; ‘and I will go alone! ’

“I saw the triumph glisten in his eye.

“‘Very well,’ said he; ‘you may start in the morning. Make your own arrangements. I give you full power to transact the business in hand as your wisdom may dictate.’

“And I started in the morning. Two weeks later I returned, successful beyond all hope. I not only brought back a band of the leading men of the tribe for a council, but I brought also a young woman for my wife. I called her Pelagie after one of my sisters.

“As I think of it now it seems miraculous that I succeeded. I am half convinced that I was inspired from out the profundity of my hate to do and say the right things.

“Latour played skilfully the part of gratitude and

joy, but I saw, nevertheless, the deep, devilish disappointment that he felt. And I was very glad, for I had conquered in this first combat; and also Pela-gie was a pleasant woman.

“As the winter deepened, Latour and I became more and more inseparable. We outdid each other in acts of seeming kindness, until all the post was jealous of my intimacy with the master.

“They little guessed how we played a ghastly game that would be finished only when one of us could smirk and flatter no more.

“The winter grew bitter; heavy snows fell. And I wondered much what great honour Latour would heap upon me next, seeing that I was so capable and willing. Near Christmas Latour called me to his office, and the light of anticipated triumph was upon his face.

“‘My friend,’ said he; ‘I do not wish to impose upon you, but I have in mind a great service that you may render me, as a friend, mind you, Re-contre. I am sure that you will succeed unless you freeze to death or get killed by the Indians. None but a brave man would attempt what I shall mention. I have a very important communication to forward to the office at St. Louis. It must be there before the middle of March or the Company will suffer heavy losses. If you can get this there at the time stated, you shall be advanced considerably, with a raise of wages. Now how would you like being my private clerk?’

"I stared into Latour's eyes and saw all hell deep down in them.

"'Give me a good dog to carry my bedding,' said I, 'and I will be at St. Louis by the middle of March,' and then I thanked him extravagantly for this last and greatest of favours. All the time I hated the man more pitilessly than ever before because of his shallowness in hoping to flatter me into getting myself frozen to death.

"I started the next day with 1700 miles of frozen prairie before me. I felt a strange joy at the thought of my hardships. Once again I would have the joy of seeing disappointment in the eyes of my enemy, and my soul could laugh again. I say I was glad to go, even though I was obliged to leave Pelagie behind at a time when the post was ravaged with the smallpox.

"It was a trip to make one love hell by comparison. Nothing but my hate sustained me. On March 10th I delivered the written message to the official at St. Louis. He read it wonderingly.

"'What!' said he; 'have you walked from Union to deliver *this*?'

"I stated that I had and he shook his head, frowned and dismissed me. I never knew what was in that message. I surmise that it was nothing of much importance.

"When the first boat started up the river for the North I went with it and arrived at Fort Union in late June. Latour was at the landing when the boat

pulled in. He threw his arms about my neck and actually kissed me upon the cheek. He then and there made me his private clerk with my former salary doubled. He treated me as a brother.

“But I saw in the depth of his eyes the soul-fret of a wounded beast.

“When we reached his office walking arm in arm, he gently told me of the serious sickness of Pelagie, and how he had looked after her like a brother through the hard winter.

“I hurried to my home. I found Pelagie delirious with the fever of smallpox. All that night I sat beside her, my heart aching, for I felt that she would die.

“And for the time I forgot my hate for Latour, until, in her feverish tossing about, she threw her bare arm over the side of the bed. Then I saw that which made me shiver with a desire to kill. There was a scratch on the arm, and the flesh about it was swollen and blue. It came to me that Latour had caused her to be inoculated that she might die before my return, and thus make my heart sore that he might see.

“I grasped the dirk and ran wildly out of the house in search of Latour. I reached his door. Then I faltered. It was not fear that made me falter. It was that I knew my revenge could not be completed in this way. I wanted to see him suffer more than I had ever suffered. Also I wished to come away with clean hands. I did not know how

it could be done then, but I trusted to some mysterious power that had seemed to be with me all through my terrible winter tramp.

“I stole back to the bedside of Pelagie. She died at dawn.

“Latour mourned with me. He wept and spoke touchingly of his own wife. I gritted my teeth and strained every nerve to keep from choking him.

“The summer passed. Latour was so kind that I often found it an effort to keep alive my belief in his treachery. And at other times, I was obliged to leave him abruptly, feeling a madness in my blood for striking him down, trampling him, tearing him with my teeth and nails.

“Oh, all the great actors have not appeared upon the stage! I must confess that Nature and Zephyr Recontre killed a great actor!

“The fall came, and our friendship did not abate. I began to fear that my chance would never come, and I would be obliged to kill him as one brute kills another. Many nights I lay awake shaping impossible schemes of revenge that were rejected in the sanity of the morning.

“In the first week of October I had occasion for a great joy. Latour called me to his office and stated that certain conditions of the trade which had been wholly unforeseen, made it necessary that he should be in St. Louis before the winter set in. Unfortunately, the last steamboat had left Fort Union for the South, making it necessary that the trip be made in

a mackinaw boat. Would I, his dearest friend, consent to accompany him on the trip?

“With a studied reluctance that hid my insane joy, I consented. Latour left a clerk in charge of affairs, and we started. We made very slow progress, as we depended almost entirely upon the current, having no oars, and there being little wind to fill the square sail we carried.

“This was as I wished it to be. I kept longing for the ice to come down and shut us in. Time and again I managed to run the boat aground on bars in order to kill time. Latour seemed not to notice this. In fact, he was unusually pleasant in his bearing toward me.

“We had a small hut built on the mackinaw, fitted with two bunks, and a small box stove for cooking. When we tied up to the shore for the night and turned in, I was often obliged to choke back laughter at the comedy that we played—a grim comedy. Each of us would at once feign deep slumber, ever now and then opening our eyes to see how the other slept. Once our eyes chanced to meet in the dim candle light of the room, for Latour insisted upon the candle. We both grinned and rolled over.

“Our understanding seemed perfect; and yet, owing to the devilish refinement of our mutual hate, neither really feared any vulgar act of violence from the other. We knew that the thing would not be done in that way.

“We had made about five hundred miles down

stream into the very heart of the wilderness, when the ice began running. Within twenty-four hours after that, we were frozen in. A heavy snow began falling and continued for a week. It lay three feet deep upon the level, and was so light as to make it impossible to take the trail.

“Latour and I merrily set about to chop wood, not knowing how long we might be forced to live in the little cabin of the mackinaw.

“We had brought only about half enough provisions for the trip, having depended upon hunting for much of our food, as there was a great deal of game in those days. The deep snow made it impossible to get much game, so that in less than two weeks our little supply of lyed corn was almost exhausted.

“One morning Latour said that he was sick, and remained in his bunk. At first I looked upon this with suspicion, thinking that he thus sought to throw the duties of seeking game wholly upon me, who had proved myself so capable and willing. But the next morning I knew it was no sham, for he had a high fever, and was delirious at times. You see, he had been used to luxury, and his feeble constitution had not been equal to the thorough soaking we got while chopping wood in the deep snow.

“Often in his delirium he linked my name with bitter curses. At last he had betrayed his hate, and I smiled, knowing that he would lose the game at last, since he no longer had the cunning to continue it.

“Again it began to snow; it was a hard winter.

Much as I might have wished to seek game for my sick enemy, I could not even seek it for myself. Nature had taken a hand in the game; I began to feel her master-touch in the bitter scheme of things. She seemed determined to starve us both; but I knew that I could last longer than Latour with his constitution weakened by too much easy life.

“So I blessed the snow as it deepened. Latour would die before my eyes; and then afterward I too would die, the winner of the game. It would be a most sublime revenge, it seemed to me; for I think I was hardly sane when I was near Jules Latour. It would be like Samson crushing his enemies and himself together. No one could blame me, should our bodies be found. I would have had my revenge and still none could blame me.

“There was a small quantity of lyed corn left. I ate sparingly of this, carefully saving Latour’s share for him when he should wish to eat.

“One morning he awoke from his delirium; he asked for food.

“‘I have saved your share for you,’ said I. ‘I might have eaten it, for I think we shall starve to death in a week or so. The snow is too deep and soft for hunting. Still I have divided fair with you, remembering your great kindness to Pelagie, remembering your great kindness in allowing me to distinguish myself among the Blackfeet, remembering your generosity in allowing me to take your message to St. Louis. Do you remember?’

"He groaned, and his eyes became cold and savage, like a starved wolf's.

"I gave him his lyed corn and he ate. His delirium returned. He cursed Recontre bitterly. He clenched his feverish, white hands about the imaginary neck of Zephyr Recontre; and I smiled.

"In two days more all the lyed corn had been eaten. In the meanwhile the surface of the snow had hardened with the intense cold. I could have hunted, for I was not yet too weak, and there was a gun and plenty of ammunition. But I did not go hunting. I saw Latour weakening rapidly. He might die during my absence, and I would thus lose the sweetness of my revenge. It seemed to me that this would be like selling my birthright for a mess of pottage.

"I could have taken the gun and gone south over the snow to Fort Pierre, several hundred miles down the river. But I did not go. Latour had not died yet. After he died, if I could still walk, I might go.

"All day I sat beside the little box stove, gazing upon Latour. At night I slept lightly, awakening often to see how fever and hunger dealt with Latour. He might die while I slept.

"One day in December, I cannot remember just when, for I myself was often delirious with hunger, Latour again awakened from delirium.

"'Food, food!' he gasped. 'For God's sake, Recontre, don't let a man starve like this! Let's make it up between us; only give me something to eat!'

"His voice was thin like a sick woman's. His face was the face of a damned man.

"'Make what up?' I said sweetly. My voice was also thin. I struggled continuously with a terrible giddiness. I felt as one in a nightmare. I, too, was starving.

"Latour stared upon me with tears in his faded eyes, and groaned. I, too, fetched tears; it was easy to weep in my weakened condition.

"'I have no food,' said I; 'neither can I go in search of any. I am starving, and the snow is deep. Would I not go if I could? Would I not go for *you*? Can I forget Pelagie and the Blackfeet trip? Can I forget the winter trip to St. Louis?'

"Latour fainted. I shouted feebly with an insane joy; I thought he had died.

"In a few moments he revived, and again begged piteously for food. I wept, and said there was none. Then he became delirious and cursed me like a devil. I never heard such cursing before nor since.

"And the strange thing about it all was that I pitied Latour. But my hate had become a mania; I could not relent.

"What passed after that hour I cannot remember with distinctness. Dreams were real, and reality was a dream. I only remember in a vague way, as though it had happened in a nightmare, that Latour died cursing me; that I sang and shouted; that I crawled out of the hut on my hands and knees, laughing and shouting, and that I saw a band of men

coming over the frozen snow from the direction of Fort Pierre. I remember hearing them call my name as with the voices of a dream. I remember that I cried out, 'Latour has just died!' And then I remember laughing and crying, not knowing why I did.

"I remember that these men gave me food—warm food—and that after a long sleep I awoke and saw a Jesuit missionary kneeling at my bedside.

"It was then that I tasted the full sweetness of my triumph. The priest was *blessing me!* He spoke of the Christlike kindness of Zephyr Recontre, who had not deserted his sick master.

"I did not see Latour again. The Jesuit's party had chopped a hole in the ice and had given his body to the river."

VII

THE SINGER OF THE ACHE

The Old Omaha Speaks

NOW this is the story of one who walked not with his people, but with a dream.

To you I tell it, O White Brother, yet is it not for you, unless you also have followed the long trail of hunger and thirst—the trail that leads to no lodge upon the high places or the low places, by flowing streams or where the sand wastes lie.

It shall be as the talking of a strange tribe to you, unless you also have peered down the endless trail, with eyes that ached and dried up as dust, and felt your pony growing leaner and shadow-thin beneath you as you rode, until at last you sat upon a quiet heap of bones and peered and peered ahead.

Moon-Walker was he called—he who walked for the moon. But that was after he had called his pony from the grazing places and mounted for the long ride. Yet was there a time when he ran about among the lodges laughing very merrily with many boys and girls, who played with hoop and spear, made little bloodless wars upon unseen peoples, and played in little ways the big, sad games of men. And then

he was called by many names, and all of the names, though different, meant that he was happy.

But once his mother and his father saw how that a man began to look out of his eyes, began to hear a man talking in his throat; and so they said: "It is the time for him to dream."

So they sent him at nightfall to the hill of dreams —as is the custom of our people.

Wahoo! the bitter hill of dreams! Many have I seen go up there laughing, but always they came down with halting feet and with sadness in their faces. And among these many, lo! even I who speak —therefore should my words be heard.

And he of the many names went up into the hill of dreams and dreamed. And in through the mists that strange winds blow over the hills of sleep burst a white light, as though the moon had grown so big that all the sky was filled from rim to rim, leaving no place for sun and stars. And upon the surface of the white light floated a face, an awful face —whiter than the light upon which it floated; and so beautiful to see that he of the many happy names ached through all his limbs, and cried out and woke. Then leaping to his feet, he gazed about, and all the stars had grown so small that he looked thrice and hard before he saw them; and the world was shrunken.

And frightened at the strangeness of all things, he fled down the hillside into the village. His mother and his father he wakened with bitter crying.

"How came the dream?" they whispered; for upon the face of him who went up a boy they saw that which only many years should bring; and in his eyes there was a strange light.

"A face! a face!" he whispered. "I saw the face of the Woman of the Moon! Whiter than snow, it was, and over it a pale flame went! Oh, never have I seen so fair a face; and there was something hidden in it swift as lightning; something that would be thunder if it spoke; and also there was something kind as rain that falls upon a place of aching heat. Into the north it looked, high up to where the lonesome star hangs patient.

"And there was a dazzle of white breasts beneath, half-hidden in a thin blanket of mist. And on her head, big drifts of yellow hair; not hanging loose as does your hair, O mother, but heaped like clouds that burn above the sunset. My breast aches for something I cannot name. And now I think that I can never play again!"

And there was a shaking of heads in that lodge, and a wondering, for this was not good. Not so had others, big in deeds, dreamed upon the hill in former times. Always there had been a coming of bird, or beast, or reptile, wrapped in the mystery of strange words; or there had been the cries of fighting men, riding upon a hissing of hot breaths; or there had been a stamping of ponies, or the thin, mad song of arrows.

But here it was not so, and the mother said:

“Many times the false dreams come at first, and then at last the true one comes. May it not be so with him?”

And the father said: “It may be so with him.”

So once again up the hill of dreams went the boy. And because of the words of his father and mother, he wept and smeared his face with dust; his muddy hands he lifted to the stars. And he raised an earnest voice: “O Wakunda! send me a man’s dream, for I wish to be a big man in my village, strong to fight and hunt. The woman’s face is good to see, but I cannot laugh for the memory of it. And there is an aching in my breast. O Wakunda! send me the dream of a man!”

And he slept. And in the middle of the night, when shapeless things come up out of the hills, and beasts and birds talk together with the tongues of men, his dream came back.

Even as before the moon-face floated in a lake of cold white fire—a lake that drowned the stars. And as he reached to push it from him, lo! like a white stem growing downward from a flower, a body grew beneath it! And there was a flashing of white lightning, and the Woman of the Moon stood before him.

Then was there a burning in the blood of the boy, as she stooped with arms held wide; and he was wrapped about as with a white fire, through which the face grew down with lips that burned his lips

as they touched, and sent pale lightnings flashing through him.

And as the dream woman turned to run swiftly back up the star-trails he who dreamed reached out his arms and clutched at the garments of light that he might hold the thing that fled, for dearer than life it seemed to him now.

And he woke. His face was in the dust. His clutching hands were full of dust.

Wahoo! the bitter hill of dreams! Have you climbed it, O White Brother, even as I?

And in the morning he told the dream to his father, who frowned; to his mother—and she wept. And they said: "This is not a warrior's dream, nor is it the dream of a Holy Man; nor yet is it the vision of a mighty bison hunter. Some strange new trail this boy shall follow—a cloudy, cloudy trail! Yet let him go a third time to the hill—may not the true dream linger?"

And the boy went up again; his step was light; his heart sang wildly in his breast. For once again he wished to see the Woman of the Moon.

But no dream came. And in the morning the pinch of grief was upon his face and he shook his fists at the laughing Day. Then did he and a great Ache walk down the hill together. All things were little and nothing good to see. And in among his people he went, staring with eyes that burned as with a fever, and lo! he was a stranger walking there! Only the Dream walked with him.

And the sunlight burned the blue, much-beaded tepee of the sky, and left it black; and as it burned and blackened, burned and blackened, he who dreamed the strange dream found no pleasure in the ways of men. Only in gazing upon the round moon did he find pleasure. And when even this was hidden from him for many nights and days he went about with drooping head, and an ache was in his eyes.

And in these days he made wild songs; for never do the happy ones make songs—they only sing them. Songs that none had heard he made. Not such as toilers make to shout about the camp fires when the meat goes round. Yet was the thick, hot dust of weary trails blown through them, and cries of dying warriors, and shrieks of widowed women, and whimpering of sick *zhinga zhingas*; and also there was in them the pang of big man-hearts, the ache of toiling women's backs, the hunger, the thirst, the wish to live, the fear to die!

So the people said: “Who is this *nu zhinga* who sings of trails he never followed, of battles he never fought? No father is he—and yet he sings as one who has lost a son! Of the pain of love he sings—yet never has he looked upon a girl!”

And it was the way of the boy to answer: “I seek what I do not find, and so I sing!”

And the nights and days made summers and winters, and thus it was with the Singer of the Ache. He grew tall even to the height of a man—yet was

he no man. For little did he care to hunt, and the love of battles was not his. Nor his the laughter of the feast fires. Nor did he look upon the face of any maiden with soft eyes.

And the father and mother, who felt the first frosts upon their heads, said: "Our son is now a man; should he not build a lodge and fill it with a woman? Should we not hear the laughter of *zhinga zhingas* once again before we take the black trail together?"

And because his father had many ponies, many maidens were brought before him for his choosing. But he looked coldly upon them and he said: "The stars are my sisters and my brothers, and the Moon is my wife, giving me songs for children. Soon shall there be a long trail for me."

Thereat a cry went up against him and more and more he walked a stranger. Only the Dream walked with him; and he sang the songs that ache.

Harsh words the father spoke: "Does the tribe need songs? Can hungry people eat a silly shout, or will enemies be conquered with a singing?"

But the mother wept and said: "Say not so of him. Do not his songs bring tears, so strange and sweet they are at times? Does a man quarrel with the vessel from which he drinks sweet waters, even if it be broken and useless for the cooking?"

And the father frowned and said: "Give me many laughers, and I will conquer all the enemies and fill all the kettles of the feasts! 'Let the weepers

and makers of tears drag wood with the women. Always have I been a fighter of battles and a killer of bison. This is not my son!"

And it happened one night that the Singer stood alone in the midst of his people, when the round Moon raised a shining forehead out of the dark, and grew big and flooded all the hills with white light. And the Singer raised his arms to it and sang as one who loves might sing to a maiden coming forth flashing with many beads from her tepee.

And the people laughed and a mutter ran about: "To whom does the fool sing thus?"

Soft, shining eyes he turned upon them, and he said: "Even to the Woman of the Moon! See where she looks into the North with white face raised to where the lonesome star hangs patient!"

And the people said: "This is the talk of a fool —no woman do we see!"

And then the Singer sang a new song through which these words ran often: "Only he sees who can—only he sees who can!"

So now he walked a fool among his people, singing the songs that ache.

Wahoo! bitter it is to be a fool! And yet, O White Brother, only they who have been fools are wise at last!

And it happened one summer that the village was builded in the flat lands by the Big Smoky Water. And there came snoring up the stream a *monda geeung*, the magic fire-boat of the palefaces. Up to

the shore it swam, and they who guided it tied it to the sand, for its fires were hungry and there was much wood in our lands.

And all the villagers gathered there to see the magic swimmer of the palefaces; and among them came the lonesome singing fool.

And it happened that a woman of the palefaces came forth and stood high up, and looked upon us, smiling. White as a snowfall in the late spring was her face, and her hair was like the sun upon a cloud. And we all stared wide-mouthed upon her, for never before had her kind come into the prairies.

Also stared the fool. Even long after all the people had gone he stared; even until the smoky breath of the fire-boat writhed like a big black serpent out of the place where the stream runs out of the sky.

And then he laid his head upon his knees and wept; for a longing, bigger than the wish to live, or the fear to die, had come upon him.

Very early in the morning, when the sleep of all things is deepest, he arose from sleepless blankets. He called his pony from the grazing places, and he mounted for a long ride. Into the North he rode, and as he rode he talked to himself and to the silence that clung about him: "It was the Woman of the Moon! Into the North she went, even unto the quiet place where the lonesome star hangs patient. There shall I ride—there shall I ride! For there do all my songs take wings and fly; and there at last

their meanings await me. There shall I ride—there shall I ride!"

And the fires of the day burned out the stars and died; downward and inward rushed the black, black ashes of the night. And still he rode toward the North.

And like the flashing of a midnight torch through a hole in a tepee flashed the days and passed. And still he rode.

Through many villages of strange peoples did he ride, and everywhere strange tongues and strange eyes questioned him; and he answered: "Into the North I ride to find the Woman of the Moon!"

And the people pitied him, because he seemed as one whose head was filled with ghostly things; and they fed him.

Further and further into the waste places he pushed, making the empty spaces sweet and sad with his singing; and the winter came. Thin and lean he grew, and his pony grew lean and thin.

And the white, mad spirits of the snow beat about the two. And now and then snow ghosts writhed up out of the ground and twisted and twirled and moaned, until they took on the shape of her he sought. And ever he followed them; and ever they fell back into the ground. And the world was bitter cold.

Wahoo! the snow ghosts that we follow, O White Brother!

And the time came when the pony was no longer

a pony, but a quiet heap of bones; and upon this sat the man who walked for the moon. Then did the strength go out of him, and he turned his sharp face to the South. He sang no more for many days, for his body was as a lodge in which a fair woman lies dead with no mourners around. And at last he wakened in a strange lodge in a village of strangers.

And it happened when the green things pushed upward into the sun again that a young man who seemed very old, for he was bent, his face was thin, his eyes were very big, hobbled back into the village of his people.

And he went to a lodge which was empty, for the father with his frowning and the mother with her weeping had taken the long trail, upon which comes no moon and never the sun rises—but the stars are there.

Many days he lay within the lonesome lodge. And it happened that a maiden, one whom he had pushed aside in other days, came into the lodge with meat and water.

So at last he said: “I have sought and have not found; therefore will I be as other men. I will fill this lodge with a woman—and this is she. Henceforth I shall forget the dream that led me; I shall be a hunter of bison and a killer of enemies; for after all, what else?”

And this he did.

So all the village buzzed with kindly words.
“The fool has come back wise!” they said.

And as the seasons passed there grew the laughter of *zhinga zhingas* in the lodge of the man who walked no more for the moon.

But a sadness was upon his face. And after a while the dream came back and brought the singing. Less and less he looked upon the woman and the children. Less and less he sought the bison, until at last Hunger came into that lodge and sat beside the fire.

Then again the old cry of the people grew up: “The fool still lives! He sings while his lodge is empty. His woman has become a stranger to him, and his children are as though a stranger had fathered them! Shall the fool eat and only sing?”

And a snarling cry grew up: “Cast out the fool!”

And it was done.

So out of the village stumbled the singing fool, and his head was bloody with the stones the people threw. Very old he seemed, though his years were not many. Into the North he went, and men saw his face no more.

But lo! many seasons passed and yet he lived and was among all peoples! For often on hot dusty trails weary men sat down to sing his songs; and women, weeping over fallen braves, found his songs

upon their lips. And when the hunger came his strange wild cries went among the people. And all were comforted!

And this, O White Brother, is the story of the fool who walked for the moon!

VIII

THE WHITE WAKUNDA

HE was the son of Sky-Walker's oldest squaw and he was born in the time when the lone goose flies (February). It was a very bitter winter, so that many years after the old men spoke of it as "the winter of the big snows."

Sky-Walker, his father, was a seer of great visions, and he had a power that was more than the power of strong arms. He was a thunder man, and he could make rain.

And when Sky-Walker's oldest squaw bore a son there was much wonder in the village, for she was far past her summer and the frost had already fallen on her hair. Also, she was lean and wrinkled.

So the old men and women came to the lodge of Sky-Walker and looked upon the newborn child. They looked and they shook their heads, for the child was not as a child should be. He was no bigger than a baby coyote littered in a terrible winter after a summer of famine. He was not fat.

"He can never be a *waschuscha* [brave]," said one old man; "I have seen many *zhinga zhingas* [babies] who grew strong, but they were not like this one. He will carry wood and water."

And Sky-Walker's old squaw arose from the blan-

kets where she lay with the child, and sat up, fixing eyes of bitterness upon those who came to pity, and she said:

“ He will be more than a killer of men or a hunter of bison. Wakunda sent him to me, for I am old and past my time. See, I am lean and wrinkled, and it is already winter in my hair. Also I had visions. Let my man tell you; he knows.”

And Sky-Walker, sitting beside the old mother, gave words to the old men and women, who knew his little words to be bigger than the big words of most men.

“ The woman speaks true. She is past her time, and she has seen things that made me wonder, and I am wise. She had visions, but in them there was no singing of arrows, nor drumming of pony hoofs, nor dancing of braves in war paint, nor cries of conquered enemies; neither was there any thunder or lightning.

“ There was only the soft speaking of quiet things—the sound of the growing of green things under the sun. And before the last moon died, once she wakened me from my sleeping, for she had had a dream. She saw her son walking a mighty man among the tribes, yet he had no weapons.

“ And a great light, greater than sunlight, was about him. This she told me. Many times have we seen together the drifting of the snows, and always her words were true words.

"And see, it is a boy, even as she dreamed. Also he has come in the time when the lone goose flies. I see much in this. He shall be alone, but high in loneliness, and he shall go far, far! Look where he gazes upon you with man-eyes! Are they the eyes of a *zhinga zhinga*?"

The old folks looked and pitied no more, for the eyes were not as other eyes. They had a strange light, making the old ones wonder.

So the word passed around and around the circle of lodges that Sky-Walker's oldest squaw had a son who was not a common *zhinga zhinga*. And as the talk grew, the name of the child grew with it. So he was called Wa-choo-bay, "the Holy One."

And as Wa-choo-bay grew, so grew the wonder of the people, for he never cried, and he talked soon. Also from the first he appeared as one over whom many winters had passed.

When he reached that age when he should have played with the other boys, he did not play, but was much alone upon the prairie without the village. He never took part in the game of Pawnee *zhay-day*, the game of spear and hoop, which made the other boys laugh and shout.

One evening in his fifth year, his father, Sky-Walker, said to him:

"It is the time for the coming of the dreams to Wa-choo-bay. Let him go afar into a lonesome place without food and lift his hands and his voice

to Wakunda. Four sleeps let him stay in the lonesome place, that his dream may come."

So his mother smeared his forehead with mud and muttered to the spirits:

"Thus shall you know Wa-choo-bay, who goes forth to have his first dream. Send him a good dream."

And Wa-choo-bay went forth into a lonesome place without food.

And on the morning of the fifth day, when the squaws were making fires, he returned, and as he entered the village and went to the lodge of his father the squaws gazed upon his face, seeing that which was very strange.

They wakened the sleepers in the lodges, saying:

"Wa-choo-bay is come back with a strange medicine-look upon his face! He has had a great dream; come and see."

And the village awoke and crowded about the lodge of Sky-Walker, who came forth and said:

"Go away! Something great has happened to my *nu-zhinga* [boy], and he is about to tell me his dream."

And the people went away, awed and silent.

In the stillness of his lodge Sky-Walker gazed upon the boy's face and said:

"What has Wa-choo-bay seen?"

And Wa-choo-bay said:

"I went far into a lonesome place; there was

nothing but the crows and the prairie and the sky. I lifted my hands and my voice as you told me. I said the words you told me. Then I slept, and when I awoke this is what I remembered; the rest was like big things moving in the mist.

“I was on the shore of the Ne Shoda [Missouri], and a little canoe came up to me, and I got in, for a voice told me to get in. Then the canoe swam out into the water and went fast. I went toward the place of summer. I rode far, many sleeps, and then as I was about to come to the end of my long riding, I awoke. Four times I saw this, and then I came here. What does it mean?”

“I do not know,” said Sky-Walker. “I must think hard, and then maybe I will know.”

And Sky-Walker shut himself in his lodge and thought hard for four sleeps. And when the fifth morning came he said to Wa-choo-bay:

“I have thought hard, and now I know that it is the big things moving in the mist that you must see. Go forth and dream again in the lonesome place.”

And so Wa-choo-bay went forth with the mud on his brow, crying to the spirits that he might see the big things that moved in the mist. He slept and dreamed. Again he was in the canoe and he rode far.

Then at last the river tossed him upon the sand, and lo! there was a big, big village before him, and the lodges of it were strange and very big. Then the big village wavered like the picture of something

in a pool that is disturbed, and vanished. And the sun was on the hills.

So Wa-choo-bay went back to his father and told him what he had seen, and Sky-Walker said:

“This is very strange. After many sunlights of flowing, the big muddy water comes to a place where a big new tribe has its lodges. And the faces of the tribe are white. Something it is about this tribe that you have dreamed. And I am afraid, for Wakunda meant that all faces should be of the colour of the earth. Let the sunlight pass, and then we shall know the meaning of this dream.”

The days grew into years, and Wa-choo-bay sat at the feet of the old men, learning much.

He learned the names of the thunder spirits that are never spoken aloud. He learned the songs that the thunder spirits love. He learned to call the rain. He learned the manner of the rite of *Wa-zhin-a-dee*, by which one may kill a man without the use of weapons. And when he had grown to be a tall youth, he was taken into the sacred lodge where the holy relics are kept. For it seemed plain that Wakunda meant him for a great medicine-man.

But it was in the summer when he had reached the height of a man that Wa-choo-bay did that which marked him for the lonesome way.

It happened that the summer had been one of peace and plenty; so the Omahas called in the Pawnees and the Poncas for a powwow, which is a great feast and a talking.

And the two neighbouring tribes had taken the peace trail and come to the Omaha village. Then there was much painting in the colours of peace, and the village that the three tribes made was more than one could see with a look.

In a great circle it lay in the flat lands of Ne Shoda, with an opening to the place of morning. And in the centre there was built a large semicircular shade of willow boughs, in which the braves would dance and sing, giving away presents of ponies, furs, hides, and trinkets that please the eye.

One day there was a great dancing and a great giving away. Many ponies had been led into the sunny centre of the semicircular shade, and given away to those whom the criers called.

And Wa-choo-bay was there, standing tall and thin, alone amid all the revellers, for more and more as the sunlights passed he thought deep thoughts.

Among the Poncas sat a young squaw who was good to see, for she was slender and taller than a common brave. And upon her forehead was the tattooed sunspot that marked her for the daughter of the owner of many ponies. She was called Umba (Sunlight), and she was the best to see of all the daughters of the assembled tribes.

To-day she sat amid the revelling and saw none of it. She saw only the tall youth, standing alone like a beech tree among a cluster of scrub oaks. And her eyes grew soft as she looked.

And when the centre of the place of shade had

cleared, she arose and walked into the centre. There she stood, a stately figure, with soft eyes fixed upon Wa-choo-bay.

At length she raised her arms toward him and sang a low, droning song, like that a mother sings to her child in the evening when the fires burn blue.

And all the people listened, breathless, for she was fair, and the song, which was a song of love, was sung to Wa-choo-bay alone, standing thin and tall and deep in thought.

Then when her song had ceased, she took off her blanket of dyed buckskin, and, holding it at arm's length toward Wa-choo-bay, she said:

"I give my blanket to the tall and lonesome one. Let him come and take it, and I shall follow him on all his trails, even if they be hard trails that lead to death!"

And Wa-choo-bay raised his eyes and gazed with a sad look upon the Ponca woman. His voice came strong, but soft:

"I cannot take the blanket; neither shall I ever take a squaw. For I am a dreamer of dreams. I shall never hear *zhinga zhingas* laughing about my lodge. I am going on a long trail, for I follow a dream. Yet have I never seen a woman so good to see. There is an ache in my breast as I speak. Let this woman follow one who kills enemies and hunts bison. I dream dreams, and a long trail is before me, and its end is in the mist."

Then Umba moaned and walked out of the circle with her head bowed.

And Sky-Walker, seeing this, said:

“It is even as I said. He was born in the time of the lone goose. He shall be alone, but high in loneliness; and he shall go far, far.”

And the time came when the tribes took the homeward trail. Then one day Wa-choo-bay raised his voice among the people and said:

“My time is come to go. I take a long, lonesome trail, for a dream dreamed many times is leading me.”

Then he went down to the great river where a canoe lay, and the people followed.

They said no word as he pushed the canoe into the current and shot downstream, for a white light was upon his face, and the dream rode with him.

Then Sky-Walker and his old squaw climbed a high bluff and watched the speck that was Wa-choo-bay fading in the mist of distance.

“This is the last I shall see,” said the old woman, “for I am old and the winter is in my hair. But great things will happen when I am gone.”

And under the shade of a lean hand raised toward she saw the black speck vanish in the blue of distance.

Summers and winters passed. Sky-Walker and his old squaw died; the name of Wa-choo-bay became a dim and mystic thing. Yet often about the

fires of winter, when the wind moaned about the lodges, the old men talked of the going away of the Holy One, making the eyes of the youths grow big with wonder.

And often the old men and women gazed from the high bluff down the dim stretches of the muddy river, wondering when Wa-choo-bay would come back, for it was said that great things would happen at his coming.

It happened many years after the going away of Wa-choo-bay that the Omaha tribe had its village in the valley on a creek near the big muddy water.

It was the time when the sunflowers made sunlight in the valleys and when the women were busy pulling weeds from the gardens.

One evening a band of youths, who had been playing on the bluffs overlooking the far reaches of the river, came with breathless speed and terror-stricken faces into the village.

“*Monda geeung* [devil boat]!” they cried, pointing to the river. “A big canoe breathing out smoke and fire is swimming up Ne Shoda.”

The whole village scrambled up the bluffs, and what they saw was not forgotten for many moons. It was a boat, but it was not as other boats. It breathed smoke and fire. It grunted and puffed like a swimmer in a heavy current.

It had a great arm that reached before it. Also it had two noses, where the smoke and fire came out. It had eyes along its side that sparkled in the

evening sunlight. There was none to paddle it, yet it moved steadily against the current.

The people stood bunched closely together and shivering with fear as the monster approached. With a chugging and a swishing and a coughing, it swam, turning its head towards the bluff where the people watched and reaching out its one big arm toward them.

"It sees us! It wishes to eat us!" cried the people, and like a herd of frightened bison they ran and tumbled down the bluff. They hid in their lodges with their weapons grasped in their hands. They made no noise, lest the monster should find them.

But the devil-swimmer did not come. The people listened. At length the sound of the mighty breathing stopped, then it began again and grew dimmer and dimmer until it died away far up the stream.

And when the people came forth cautiously from their hiding, a man, tall, thin, with a strange look upon his bronze face, stood in the centre of the village.

Awed by the mien of the stranger, the people stared in silence. The sun had fallen and the shadows of the evening were about him. Also he wore garments that were not as Wakunda meant garments should be.

The stranger cast a long gaze about him, then raised his arms and said in a voice that was strong but soft:

“I breathe peace upon my people.”

The words were Omaha words, yet they sounded strange.

Again the voice was raised in the shadows and passed like a wind among the people, shaking them.

“I am Wa-choo-bay—he who followed the long dream-trail—and I am come back with a great wisdom for the tribes.”

But the people only trembled, and the old men whispered:

“It is not Wa-choo-bay, but his spirit. Well is the face remembered, but the words are not man-words.”

Then the stranger passed about the circle of the wondering people, touching them as he went, for he had heard the whispering of the old men. And the people shrank from him.

“I am Wa-choo-bay,” cried the stranger again. “I am the son of Sky-Walker. I am a man, and not a spirit. Give me meat, for I am hungry.”

And they gave him meat, and he ate. Then only did the people know him for a man.

In the days that followed, Wa-choo-bay told many strange things of the white-faced race whose camp fires were kindled ever nearer and nearer the people of the prairie. Also he said words that were not common words. They were medicine-words.

And before many moons had grown and died these things travelled far and wide across the prairie, until in many tribes the wonder grew. Around many

camp fires was told the tale of how an Omaha had come back after being many years in the lands that lay toward the place of summer; also of the devil-boat in which he came, and of the new wisdom he was talking.

So there was a great moving of the tribes toward the village of the Omahas. The Poncas, the Pawnees, the Osages, the Missouris, the Otoes—all heard the strange tale and took the trail that led to the village lying in the flat lands of Ne Shoda.

And in the time when the prairie was brown there was a great gathering of the prairie peoples in the flat lands.

The cluster of villages that they made was so broad that a strong man walked from morning until the sun was high before he reached the other side. Then one morning when the tribes had gathered Wa-choo-bay went to the top of a bluff that stood bleak against the sky, and the people followed, sitting below him upon the hillside, for they wished to hear the strange words that would be spoken that day.

Wa-choo-bay, standing thin and tall against the sky, raised his arms and his face to the heavens, breathing strange words above the people, upon whom a great hush fell.

And it happened that in the hush a tamed wolf among the people near the summit of the bluff raised its snout and mourned into the sudden stillness.

And its master beat it for the noise it made until it cried with pain.

Then a strange thing happened. Wa-choo-bay walked in among the gazers and laid caressing hands upon the wolf, calling it by gentle names until it licked his hands.

And when he returned to the summit, the wolf followed, licking the feet of Wa-choo-bay as it went.

Then Wa-choo-bay raised his voice, and it went even to the farthest listener, though it seemed a soft voice.

“This is the first I shall teach you: be kind to everything that lives.”

And the people wondered much. This was a new teaching.

In the hush of awe that fell, Wa-choo-bay spoke again, while the wolf sat by him, licking his feet. He told of his being in the lands that lay toward the summer; of the great white-faced race that lived there; of the great villages that they built, having lodges bigger than half a prairie village.

He told of the strength of this great white-faced race; of how they were moving steadily toward the people of the prairie. And then he told in quaint phrases the story of Christ and His teachings of kindness.

“These things I learned from the great medicine-men of the white-faced race, and they are wise men,” said Wa-choo-bay. “It is this that has made their people great. So I have come to say: Have no more fighting on the prairie; be one great tribe, even like the white-faces; build great villages like

them, for I have learned that only they who build great villages and do not wander shall live. The others must flee like the bison when hunters follow.

"And I will teach you the wise words of the great white Wakunda's Son, who died because he loved all the tribes. It is a teaching of peace—a teaching that we be kind to our enemies."

Then there arose one among the Osages, an old man, and he said:

"These are big words. Let Wa-choo-bay call down rain upon us if this big white God loves him."

Then arose one among the Pawnees, and he cried in broken Omaha:

"I say with my Osage brother, let Wa-choo-bay do some medicine-deed, that we may know him for a holy one."

And still another among the Poncas arose and said:

"If this be true that we have heard, how Wa-choo-bay came back in a holy boat, and that his big white Wakunda is so strong and loves Wa-choo-bay, let him send the rain, and we will fall upon our faces."

Then the whole concourse of tribes sent up a shout:

"Give us some medicine-deed!"

And when the shout had died, Wa-choo-bay smiled a smile of pity and said:

"I am not the big white Wakunda; I am only one who talks for Him and loves Him, for I have

seen a new light. I can do no medicine-deeds. Neither can anyone among you do medicine-deeds. It is all a dreaming—and we must awaken."

Then there was a great crying, an angry storm of voices about the hill. It beat upon the bleak summit where Wa-choo-bay stood with face and hands raised to the heavens, breathing a prayer of the white-faces.

There was a breaking up of the concourse and a walking away. But one among the people hurled a stone with sure aim and struck Wa-choo-bay upon the side of the face. He staggered, and the blood came. But he showed no anger.

Turning the other side of his face, he said:

"Let him who threw the stone throw again and strike me here. Even so the great white Wakunda's Son suffered."

But the second stone was not cast, and Wa-choo-bay was left alone with the wolf upon the summit, kneeling and muttering words of kindness.

The day passed, and still he knelt upon the summit. But when the dark had fallen, he became aware of someone near him. He raised his head and saw in the starlight a woman lying upon her face before him, and she was moaning.

Wa-choo-bay lifted her and looked into her face. It was a face that he had known of old, only the winters had changed it.

"I am Umbo, the Ponca woman," she said. "Many summers ago I spoke to you. Do you remember?"

And Wa-choo-bay said: "I have not forgotten."

Then said Umba, the Ponca woman: "Even now it is the same as then. I have come to take the hard trail with you, even the trail that leads to death, for in all these winters and summers I have taken no man."

And she wiped the blood from his face with her blanket of buckskin.

There was an aching in the breast of Wa-choo-bay as he said these words, which the Ponca woman could not understand, though her tongue was one with his:

"From now through all the summers and winters that follow, your name shall be Mary."

"Have you heard my words?" he said after a long silence.

"I have heard," said the woman, "and I believe. I alone among all the villagers believe."

"Then shall you follow me on my lonesome trail. I see not its end, for it is in the mist."

The days when the prairie was brown passed, and the snows came. And there was one who followed a bitter winter trail.

From village to village he went, speaking words of kindness and doing good deeds. But everywhere he was driven from the villages. And there were two who followed him—two faithful disciples—the woman, whose name was changed to Mary, and the wolf.

And ever the tall thin man, whose face was pinched with hunger and the cold, gave kind words to those who offered blows.

It happened in the time of *Hunga-Mubli*—the time when the snows drift against the north sides of the lodges, that a rumour ran across the prairie—a rumour that a strange sickness had come to the village of the Poncas. It was the sickness called *Gchatunga*, the sickness of the big, red sores.

Then Wa-choo-bay and his two disciples turned weary feet toward the stricken village of the Poncas. It was a hard trail, with little food and much cold.

And when the three entered the stricken village there was a rejoicing among the Poncas, for they said:

“Might it not be that this one whom we have spurned is stronger than we thought?”

But Wa-choo-bay sang no medicine-songs; he performed no mystic rites. With tender hands he nursed the sick. Also he knelt beside them and said soft words that were not the words of the prairie.

And it happened that the invisible arrows of the Terror fell thicker and thicker among the Poncas. The sickness spread, and the village was filled with the delirious shrieks of the dying.

So a great, angry wail went up against Wa-choo-bay.

“The sickness grows greater, not less,” said those who were still strong. “This Wa-choo-bay’s words are not true words. There is a black spirit in him.”

So it happened that arms that were still strong seized Wa-choo-bay and bound him with thongs of buckskin. Then he was led afar from the village to the bleak, cold summit of a hill.

There they planted a post and bound Wa-choo-bay to it.

And the woman, whose name was changed to Mary, begged for him, and the wolf, with its four feet huddled together in the snow, mourned with an upward thrusting of the snout.

But Wa-choo-bay said:

“ Do not wail for me. This is the place where my trail ends. This is what was in the mist. Let these whom I love do as they will do.”

And when they had bound him to the post they whipped him with elkhorn whips.

“ Where is your white Wakunda? ” they cried, and it was a hate cry.

“ Here beside us stands the white Wakunda and His Son! ” said Wa-choo-bay; and his brow was wet with the sweat of agony. But the whippers did not see, and the whips fell harder.

And after some time Wa-choo-bay raised his head weakly to the darkening heavens, for the sun had fallen, and moaned soft words that were not prairie words.

Then his head fell forward upon his breast.

The whips fell no more. The whippers departed.

The sky was like a sheet of frosty metal and the stars were like broken ice.

Against the sky hung the thin figure of Wa-choo-bay lashed to the post, and beneath him in the shadow huddled two who sent trembling cries of sorrow into the empty spaces of the snow—a woman and a wolf.

IX

THE TRIUMPH OF SEHA

WHEN Seha had grown to be a tall youth, he said to the old men: "Now I am almost a man; what shall I do?" For being a youth, he dreamed of great things. And the old men answered: "That Wakunda knows; therefore, take yourself to a high hill; there fast and pray until sleep comes, and with it a vision."

So Seha arose and laid aside his garments, and naked, went out on the prairie. When he had gone far, he climbed to the top of a lonely hill, bare of grass and strewn with flakes of stone that made its summit white like the head of a man who has seen many winters.

Then he knelt upon the flinty summit, and raising his palms to the heavens, he cried: "O Wakunda, here needy stands Seha!" Four times he uttered the cry, yet there was no sound save that of the crow overhead, and the wind in the short grass of the hill-side.

Then he fell into an agony of weeping, and wetting his palms with his tears, he rubbed them in the white dust and smeared his face with mud. Then he cast his wet eyes to the heavens, and again raised his hands in supplication.

"O Wakunda, Seha is a young man; he would do great things like the old men; send him a vision!"

The night came down and still he held his eyes upon the darkening heavens, crying for a vision. But only the coyote answered him. The stars looked out of the east and steadily climbed upward, gazing upon his tearful face. But when the grey of age began to grow upon the forehead of the Night, he grew so weary that he fell forward upon his face and slept.

And lo! the vision came!

It seemed that the skies were black and fierce as the face of a brave in anger. The lightning glared; and the thunder shouted like a warrior in the front of the battle! Then the cloud split, and through it rushed a mighty eagle with the lightning playing on its wings; its cry was like the shriek of a dying foe and its eyes were bright with the vision that sees far. Its wings hovered over Seha, and it spoke:

"Seha shall be a seer of things far off. His thought shall be quick as the lightning, and his voice shall be as thunder in the ears of men!"

Seha awoke, and he was shivering with the dews of morning. Then he arose and walked back toward his village, slowly, for his thoughts were great. Four days he went about the village, speaking to no one; and the people whispered: "Seha has had a vision; do you not see that his eyes are big with a strange light?"

One night after the four days had passed, Seha

arose from his blankets and, creeping stealthily out of his tepee, he went to the lodge of Ebahamba, who was a great medicine-man, for Seha wished to tell his vision into a wise ear.

Pulling back the buffalo robe that hung across the entrance he saw the great man sleeping in the moonlight that fell through the opening at the top of the tepee. Entering, he touched the shoulder of the sleeper, who awoke with a start, and, sitting up, stared at the young intruder. Then Ebahamba being thoroughly awakened, spoke:

"Seha has come to tell his vision; I knew he would come; speak."

"You are a great man," began Seha, "and your eyes are like the sun's eyes to see into the shadow. Hear me and teach me."

Then he told of his vision on the lonely hill.

As Ebahamba listened to the wonderful thing that had befallen the youth, his heart grew cold with envy; for certainly great things were in store for Seha, and might it not come to pass that the youth should grow even greater in power than Ebahamba himself?

So, when the youth had ceased, breathless with the wonder of the thing he told, the old man said coldly: "Wakunda will teach Seha; let him go learn of the wind and the growing things!"

Then the youth arose and left the lodge. But the big medicine-man slept no more that night, for jealousy is sleepless.

At that time it happened that the winds were hot from the southwest, and the maize grew yellow as the sun that smote it, and the rainless air curled its blades. And the old man Ebahamba cried to Wakunda for rain; but the skies only glared back for answer.

Then a great moan went up before the lodge of the big medicine-man, Ebahamba. "Ebahamba speaks with the spirits; let him pray to the thunder spirits that we may have food for our squaws and our children!"

And Ebahamba shut himself in his tepee four days, fasting, crying to the thunder spirits, and performing strange rites. But every morning the sun arose glaring like the eye of a man who dies of fever, and the hot wind sweltered up from the southwest, moaning hoarsely like one who moans with thirst; and the maize heard the moan and wilted.

Then when the people grew clamorous before the lodge of Ebahamba, he came forth and said: "The thunder spirits are sleeping; they are weary and drowsy with the heat." And the hooting of his people drove him back into his lodge.

Then Seha raised his voice above the despairing murmur of the village, saying: "Seha is a young man, yet the thunder spirits will hear him, be they ever so drowsy, for Seha has had a vision. Seha will call the rain."

The murmur of the people ceased, for so strange

a light was in the eyes of the youth that they believed.

"Let Seha give us rain," they cried, "and he shall be a great man among his people!"

Then Seha strode out of the village and disappeared in the hills. His heart was loud as he walked, for would he not be a great man among his people? He believed in his power with that belief which *is* the power. All day he walked, and when the red sun glared across the western hills like an eye blood-shot with pain, he came to a clump of cottonwoods that sang upon the summit of a bluff.

Now the thunder spirits love the cottonwoods, for they rise sternly from the earth, reaching their long arms into the clouds, and they cry back at the storm with a loud voice. Where the cottonwood sings, there the thunder spirits sleep, and the thunder birds, the eagle and the hawk, watch with keen eyes.

Under the trees Seha stood, and raising his hands and his eyes to the heavens, he cried: "Hear Seha! For is he not a thunder man? Did he not dream the thunder man's dream? Then I command you, send the big clouds boiling before the wind; send the rains, that my people may have food for their children. Then I will be a great man among my people!"

The trees only tossed their branches above him, while they sang softly in the wind.

"O Thunder Spirits!" he cried again. "You are not asleep! I hear you talking together in the tree tops. Listen to me, for I am a thunder man!"

Then a dead calm grew. The cottonwoods were still. Suddenly they groaned with a cool gust from the east. The groan was like a waking man's groan when he arises, stretching and yawning, from his blankets.

Then Seha lay down to sleep; for were not the thunder spirits awake?

When the night was late, Seha was awakened by the howl of the thunder. He saw the quick lightning pierce the boiling darkness in the east. Then the rain drops danced upon the dry hills with a sound like the unintelligible patter of many voices that are glad.

Seha was glad, and he answered the shout of the thunder. His people in the village were glad, and their tongues were noisy with the name of Seha. The maize was glad and it looked up to the kind sky, tossing its arms in exultation.

When Seha returned to the village, he was the centre of a joyful cry; he had become a great man among his people. And when they asked from whence he had such great powers, he said: "I caught it from the blowing wind; I heard it in the growing of the maize."

But there was one who did not greet the mysterious youth. Ebahamba shut himself in his tepee, for had he not failed to awaken the thunder spirits

when a youth had succeeded? Ebahamba sat sullenly in his tepee, thinking great and fierce thoughts; and after many days of fasting, his magic came back to him. Then he summoned to his lodge one by one, the men of his band, and he said to each: "Behold! Seha speaks with evil spirits. May he not destroy his people? Then let us perform the rite of *Wazhinadee* against him that he may be forsaken by man and beast and so die!"

The men of his band believed Ebahamba, for his magic was very great now, and he forced them to believe. So each man went to his tepee, shut himself in, feasted and thought sternly against Seha. For this is the manner of the rite of *Wazhinadee*.

Then after his enemies had thought strongly for many days against him, Seha was seized with a strange weakness. His eyes lost their brightness, and he could not see far as before. All through the days and the nights he went about the village, crying for his lost power; and the people said: "The coyotes are barking in the hills." They could not see him for the mist that the terrible rite had cast about him.

Then Seha wandered out on the prairie, wailing as ever for his lost power. And after many days, he laid himself down by a stream to die. But he did not die. He slept; and the vision came again. When he awoke, he was strong again and his eyes could see far as before.

Then he said: "I will cleanse myself in the

stream and go back to my people, for I am strong again."

But lo! as he leaned over the clear stream, he beheld the reflected image of an eagle far above him. Now a medicine man can change himself at will into anything that walks or crawls or flies or is still; and as Seha watched the eagle, he knew that it was Ebahamba!

So gliding into the stream, he quickly changed himself into a great fish floundering temptingly upon the surface. The eagle, which was Ebahamba, being hungry, swooped down upon the fish with wide beak and open talons.

In a moment, Seha changed himself into a huge boulder, against which the swooping bird dashed furiously, crushing its beak and talons. Then it arose, and with bloody wings, fluttered across the prairie.

Seha stepped out of his rock and laughed a loud, long laugh, and the eagle, which was Ebahamba, heard and knew.

So Seha returned to his village and was a great man among his people. But Ebahamba hid himself in his tepee; and a rumour ran that his arms were broken and his face crushed.

And there was much wonder in the village!

X

THE END OF THE DREAM

THE old woman Gunthai had nothing but a past over which she brooded and a son upon whom she doted. Had she been able to write the latter in the letters of that tongue which came to the prairie many moons after her death, breaking with syllables of magic the spell of the centuries, she would have written it with a "u"; for her son was as the day to her; his coming was the morning and his going was the sunset. When he laughed, there was summer in the wretched little tepee; when he cried, the snows drifted about the mother-heart.

Winter and summer the old woman sat in her lodge, her back bent with the burdens of many seasons and her face seamed with many memories; yet stern and expressionless as of one who has followed a long trail and cannot see its end though the sun be falling.

All day she would sit in her lodge, weaving baskets of willow, which she exchanged with her tribesmen for meat and robes; for the father of her child was dead. Her little boy, whom she tenderly called Nu Zhinga (Little Man), would lie long hours

before her with his chin resting upon his little brown hands, watching the fingers of his mother weave the pliant twigs into form with marvellous skill, as it seemed to him; and often when the hours crept lamely, he would sing to her a monotonous song like the wind's, timing the irregular air with the beating of his toes upon the floor.

And when the little singer would cease, the old woman Gunthai often forgot the unwoven basket with gazing into his big black eyes, for in them her hope could read great deeds that were to be done after many unborn moons had waned.

Then she would tell him tales of his father; tales that were loud with the snarl of war drums, the twang of bow thongs, the shriek of arrows, the beat of hoofs! But there was no responsive glitter in the eyes of the boy; his heart was not the warrior's, and the old mother seeing this, sighed and fell to work with nervous haste.

And the days of sun and snow wove themselves into years, until Nu Zhinga had reached that time when boyhood begins to deepen into manhood; and yet as the mother looked upon her son, she found him scarcely taller than a weak man's bow.

His legs were short and bowed, his hips narrow, and upon shoulders of abnormal breadth sat his monstrous, shaggy head. It was as if he were the visible body of a black spirit's joke, save for his lustrous eyes, that were like two stars that burn big in the air of evening through a film of mist.

And thus it was that when Nu Zhinga passed through the village, those who were still foolish with youth jeered at the lad, calling his name in contempt; but the old men and women who had grown wise, only shook their heads and pitied Gunthai in silence.

But the boy would take no notice of his tormentors, walking on sullen and silent. He lived in a little world of his own, which was isolated from the great world by the unkindness of his people, like a range of frozen hills; and in this small world there were but three dwellers: Gunthai, a tame grey wolf, and one other. That other was a despised little cripple and her name was Tabea (Frog).

These three, and about them the chromatic glory of dreams like a sunrise that lingers—this was the world of Nu Zhinga. All day amid the quiet of the summer hills Nu Zhinga and Tabea played together; he telling of the great indefinite things that he would do in that big mysterious sometime when the days would be pregnant with wonders! For in his soul the pulse of uncertain but lofty resolve bounded, and as he peered into the future, lo! it was vast, yet dim with misty possibilities like a broad stretch of prairie expanding under the new moon! And she, with all of her crooked little body attentive, listened and believed even more than she heard; which is the way of those who love.

And then these two, after the manner of children, would play at life, building a tepee with willows

from a convenient creek; and Tabea would groan as she bore the heavy burdens, thus showing how she would toil for him and suffer. Then when the tepee was built, she would go about droning a song, with her back bent as with the weight of an infant, thus showing how she would carry the child of Nu Zhinga in that big and sunlit sometime.

One day when the last white footstep of the winter had vanished from the coldest valley, the old woman Gunthai laid aside a finished basket and called her boy to her side.

"It is the time," she said; "the time is ripe with summers. Nu Zhinga must eat no meat for four days; then he must go to the hill where the visions come, that he may know what is to be for him in the light of the unborn moons."

So Nu Zhinga ate no meat for four days, and when the fourth evening came, as the fires roared upward among the circled lodges, he passed through the village and took his way to the high hill of dreams. It was the time when the valleys are loud with the song of frogs and when the Earth begins to learn anew the pleasant lesson of the Sun.

When he had stopped, breathless with toiling up the long incline, for he was weak with hunger, he turned and looked back upon the jumbled village and saw, indistinctly through the mist of the evening, his mother standing before the door of her lodge, straining her gaze that she might see her boy for the last time, climbing to the height where the

dream awaited, that should send him back a man with a future big in deeds.

Then Nu Zhinga climbed on to the summit of the hill and watched the west pass from brilliant colours into dun, and the darkness come with the stars. In the light of a thin moon the far hills whitened. The big stars glowed kindly like the camp fires of a friendly people. The night wind talked to itself in the gulches; and attentive to these, Nu Zhinga forgot the reason of his coming, and lulled by the many pleasant sounds, fell asleep and was awakened by the pale damp Dawn.

Then he ran down the hill, and as he passed through the village, the old women, some busy about the steaming kettles, others bent beneath the loads of fuel, shook their heads and said: "Gunthai's boy has had no vision; not so do they return who dream great dreams."

In the doorway of her lodge Gunthai stood awaiting the approach of her son. Her body that was wont to be bent like a bow upon which a heavy hand is laid in anger, was erect and quivering as is the bow when the arrow has sped like a purpose. Upon her leathery, wrinkled face dwelt the glimmer of an inner illumination. Only the flesh was old, the light was young; for Hope is a youth.

As the lad approached, the tenseness of expectation held the old woman's tongue and her question came from her eyes. "What has Nu Zhinga dreamed?"

"I saw the stars that were like the eyes of a friend," said the boy, "and I heard the wind as it sang to itself in the gulches. I slept and woke and the Sun was laughing on the hills!"

Many seasons sit lightly upon a form when Hope sits with them; but Despair is heavy, and again the weight of many years bent the shoulders of the mother. When the sun leaves a cloud of glory, it leaves a mass of murk; thus passed the light from the wrinkled face of Gunthai.

There was a sigh in her voice as she spoke; a sigh like that of a wind that is heavy with rain: "There should have come a dream loud with the noises of battle and shrill with the flight of arrows! Thus did your father dream."

So Nu Zhinga went a second and a third and a fourth time to the hill of dreams, and the last answer that his mother heard was like the first. And on the fifth day the heart of the old mother was sore with sorrow, and all that night she did not sleep, but wept and moaned: "How shall Gunthai be comforted when her eyes are dim and her fingers stiff? Her son shall not be mighty in the hunt and battle, for he has had no dream."

The lad, awakened in the night by the moaning of his mother, knew in an indefinite way that he was the cause of so much grief; and in his breast grew a great pang of soul hunger that would not pass away. Even with the giant joy of the sunrise it did not pass away.

In the early light Nu Zhinga passed out of the village, for his heart was heavy. As he walked, lo everything was sad except the sun, and the light of its gladness deepened the shadow of his sorrow. The sound of the wind moving in the bunch grass of the hillside was like a faint cry of a great pain. At length he threw himself down and buried his face in the grass. The despair of those who dream day-dreams was upon him. There was night in his heart; his small body shook with sobs. A long while he lay thus, nor did he hear the soft step that stopped beside him.

At length Nu Zhinga raised his head from the grass and saw Tabea sitting beside him with pity in her eyes and in the attitude of her crooked little body. Without a word they stared each into the face of the other; and as Nu Zhinga looked, the desolate grey of the world began to develop its wonted brilliance of colour, as though the union of their tears had produced a prism.

At length these two arose and walked among the hills, dreaming as was their wont, and again the sunlight entered the heart of Nu Zhinga. When the two outcasts entered the village, even though the youths trooped behind them shouting "Peazha!" (no good), yet the sunlight did not pass; for upon one hand walked the dreams of Nu Zhinga and upon the other, Tabea.

One day in the time of the gathering of the maize, when the brown hills shivered with the first frosts,

the voice of a crier was heard through the village calling the braves to battle; for the big chief of the Omahas would lead a war party against the Sioux.

So the old woman Gunthai took down the weapons of her fallen brave from the side of the tepee where they had hung in idleness for many moons. She strung the long unbent bow with a thong of buckskin and retipped the arrows with the feathers of the hawk. Then she wept over them, and blessed them with weird songs; and calling Nu Zhinga to her side, placed them in his hands, and said: "Bring them back red with the blood of the Sioux!"

And the youth took them, wondering why it was so very great a thing to kill.

Then the war party rode out of the village and Nu Zhinga rode with it. And there were two who climbed to the highest hill and, shading their eyes with their hands, watched the braves disappear into the distance. They were Gunthai and Tabea, and the hopes of each were great. For might not even Nu Zhinga do great deeds? Such things had been.

After many days the returning band rode up the valley that rang with the song of victory. But when it rode into the village, a great cry went up against Nu Zhinga, the squaw-hearted. For in the battle with the Sioux his pony had fallen with an arrow in its breast, and when the Omahas returned from the pitiless pursuit of their flying foes, they found him crying like a squaw over the carcass of the animal.

When the people heard this concerning Nu Zhinga, an angry cry, like that of a strong wind in a thicket, passed over the multitude gathered about the braves. "Let him go work with the squaws!" they cried. And the unanimous cry of a people is a law.

So Nu Zhinga, the squaw-hearted, carried water and wood with the women and was patient. At least he had Tabea ever near him, which was like living in the light of perpetual sunrise, and hope, like an incurable disease, would not leave his breast.

The old woman Gunthai seeing how more than squaw-hearted her son had grown, sat in her lodge weaving the baskets of willow. But the hope of her heart was gone. How she had dreamed of the prowess of her little man! How he would be mighty among his people; mighty with the arm that is pitiless and strong—a slayer of enemies! But now—and the old woman's thought would check itself at that barren gulch in the hills through which Death comes like a blast of bitter winds, for she could see no further.

So the suns came and went; but there was night for her in the brightest noon; the seasons passed, but for her heart there was cold, even in the kind midsummer.

One day in the time of the cubs (December) it happened that a child of the village was stricken with a mysterious sickness. The fierce heat of the time of the sunflowers blazed in its blood. Its eyes

glowed with the brightness of a burning thing. Its lips muttered strange words that were not the words of men; and those who listened, trembled. And after some time, the whole burning body of the child became one mass of sores.

It was then that Washkahee, the big medicine-man, came to the lodge of the sick, sang his most potent songs and performed his most mysterious rites. But one day the child leaped to its feet and stared at the wall with eyes that were glazed with terror; then shrieked and fell back limply into its blankets. And when the winter had crept into its burning blood, they buried it upon a hill; and the wonder of the village was great.

But the end was not yet. Another and another crept into his blankets, stricken with the same sickness. Then another and another, until from many lodges came the moans of the afflicted. Those who dwelt in the lodges where the scourge entered, fled from their stricken kinsmen as from the visible body of Death. They who could laugh back at the challenge of the Sioux, quailed before the subtle creeping of this invisible foe. They who were as yet untouched by the unseen Hand, huddled terrified and speechless about their fires, in the light of which they stared at each other and found each face ghastly, as though it were the mirror of their dread.

In the stillness of their bated breaths they heard the lonesome monotony of the winter wind and the swish of the drifting snow, through the drone of

which pierced like arrows of ice the occasional shrieks of the deserted dying or those who battled with grotesque terrors in the giddy whirl of feverish delirium.

With trembling fingers the women bound blankets closely across the doors of the lodges, in the hope of barring out the black spirit that wandered about the village. Vain hope! Through the walls of the strongest lodge crept the subtle spirit.

One night the sound of a wild voice crying through the storm beat into the lodges:

“Washkahee has cried to Wakunda [God] and lo! Washkahee has dreamed! Only a tuft of hair from the head of the white bison can save us! So spoke the dream to Washkahee; who will seek the white bison?”

It was as though the winter wind had found words! The people, huddled about their fires, knew the voice to be that of the big medicine-man, Washkahee, yet they did not move. The bravest had become weak as a child at the back of a squaw.

That night Nu Zhinga, lying in the lodge of his mother, heard the cry that came out of the storm; and when he slept he dreamed. He had walked far across the white prairie and his legs were aching with toil and his heart with despair. Then there broke upon his dream a mighty roar, and lo! he saw, charging down upon him, the white bison, tossing the crusted snow from its lowered horns.

“Tae Ska! Tae Ska!” (white bison) Nu Zhinga cried, and was awakened by his own voice.

So in the early light of the morning, Nu Zhinga took down the bow and arrows of his father, and wrapping himself in a buffalo robe, he strode out into the prairie with his tame wolf trotting at his heels. To him the dream was an omen. Might he not find the white bison, and thus drive death from among his people?

As he walked, the dream that had ever crept like a slow music through his blood, grew into the swaying fury of a battle-song. He timed his brisk steps with a joyous chant that echoed up the frosty valleys. He would find the white bison! Then his people would shout his name without derision. Gunthai would be glad; Tabea would be glad. Tabea! The word was music.

But meanwhile in the village thicker and thicker fell the invisible arrows of the Terror; and in the lodges where they fell dwelt the cry of agony and delirium and the muffled shriek of death. The old woman Gunthai and the cripple Tabea were not spared. The old and the young, the weak and the strong, the brave and the cowardly found no spell to ward away the stroke of the hidden Hand.

At length the fear of the tribe grew into a frenzy. It needed but an incident to lash it into madness.

One evening as the night crept westward across the hills, a brave leaped upon a pony and yelling sent the frightened animal flying up the valley. He was fleeing from the curse that hung over the village. Then the fear became a madness. The people

rushed from their lodges and, fighting for the nearest pony, fled after the lone rider who had disappeared into the night.

Those who were too weak or too unfortunate to gain the back of a pony hung to the mane and were dragged in the snow until their grips weakened, when they ran with frantic shrieks after their disappearing tribesmen. The valley leading from the village became choked with the fleeing people. Many of the stricken leaped from their blankets and followed in the wild rout, until their knees weakened and their brains swam, when they lay shrieking in the snow until death came.

From the deserted village the cries of the helpless followed the unhearing refugees, who fled as the bison flee when the pitiless hunter follows. Fainter and fainter grew the yelling until it was swallowed up in the wind that lashed the spraying snow. When the morning looked into the valley, it found no smoke arising from the silent lodges. Only the dead were there; the dead and the winter.

On the evening of the second day after the flight of the tribe, a lone form topped the hill above the village and looked down into the still white valley, where lay the snow-choked lodges, quiet as a dream. The form was short, and bent as with the toil and hunger of a long, hard trail. At its heels a gaunt, grey wolf limped and whimpered with the ache of emptiness and the frost.

The short, bent form stood still upon the summit

and shading its eyes with a hand that trembled, cast a long and searching gaze upon the lodges of his people. No smoke, no voice, no roar of fires, scented with the evening meal!

The form straightened itself and stood with head thrown back, making a thin and pitiful figure against the cruel white glare of the icy evening sky. It put a hand to its mouth, trumpet-wise, and raising the other above its head, waved about a tuft of long, grey hair.

“Tae Ska! Tae Ska!”

The voice was scarcely raised above a faint, dry wheeze that sighed dirge-like above the lifeless valley. The grey wolf with its four trembling legs drawn together in the snow, raised its frost-whitened muzzle to the fading sky and with a long, wild wail drowned the feebler voice of its master.

With limping stride, grown short and uncertain as the first steps of a papoose, the form went down the hillside and entered the village where the Winter dwelt.

“Tae Ska! Tae Ska! I have found the white bison!”

The wheezing voice passed among the lodges like a mournful wind that haunts the lonesome places of a bluff. Round and round the village went the man and the wolf, crying into the silent lodges; and the man’s face was wolflike with weariness and hunger; and the wolf’s eyes were grown half human with the pinch of emptiness and frost.

“ Why do you not come forth, for I have suffered and I have the tuft of hair? No more shall the black spirits dwell among us! Come forth and look upon the face of him whose heart was the heart of a squaw! ”

The crisp snow whined beneath his step and the wolf whined beside him. At last the form stopped before a lodge and with a trembling hand drew away the covering at the entrance.

It was the lodge of Gunthai. Two forms lay within, huddled in their blankets, and the snows had drifted about them. The man pulled the blankets from their faces. One was Gunthai and the other Tabea. Each was pinched with the pinch of death and winter, and the mystery of the last long, lonesome trail was about them both.

With a moan the form tottered and fell upon its face in the snow. And over all the valley there were but two sounds—the wail of the winter wind and the howl of a lone wolf.

Days passed, and the people who had fled from home with the pitiless scourge at their heels grew faint and weary with their wandering, and at last the homeache drove them back upon their trail. Footsore, famished, racked with the now dead terror, they toiled in silence homeward, where they could die with the sound of their own fires in their ears.

At last one morning a lone rider cautiously peered from under the brow of the hill upon the village. Nothing moved below. He urged his emaciated

pony to the summit of the hill and stopping, gazed again, shading his eyes with a hand grown weak and thin. There seemed nothing in the valley to fear. Turning about upon his pony, he raised his arms in the light of dawn and cried back into the valley beyond to the waiting remnant of his people—a long, exultant cry, for he had looked upon his home.

Slowly the returning tribe, now dwindled to half its former numbers, toiled up the hill. Only the strong were left, and now the strong were weak. The straggling band of men, women and ponies reached the summit, a pitiful, ragged multitude, and gazed for a moment into the valley. Then a great shout arose above the silent spaces, scintillant under the dawn, as the halting, famished band swooped down the hill to be again at home.

Again the fires roared upward from the lodges, and the voices of a happy people drove away the silence of the winter. There was no longer any disease; the winter and the flight had purged the tribe.

Who had saved them from the black spirits? Could a tribe run faster than the things which are not good?

The sun was at the centre of its short path when the answer to this question of the tribe broke into the lodges where the people sat about their steaming kettles. For it was then that one ran through the village waving a tuft of long, grey hair and startling the ears of his people with a shout:

“See! The tuft of hair from the head of the

white bison! It has saved us; for do you not remember the words of Washkahee?"

The people rushed from their lodges and thronged about the man who held the tuft of hair.

"Who has found the white bison?" they cried.

And the answer of him who held the tuft of hair struck the people silent with wonder:

"It was Nu Zhinga, the squaw-hearted; even he who could not dream a dream!"

XI

THE REVOLT OF A SHEEP

"There is nothing more terrible than the revolt of a sheep," said De Marsay.—*Balzac.*

OH, shut up, Hank! Dang it! Hain't you goin' to let a feller sleep none? How can I be strong enough to keep from snivellin' in the mornin', if I don't get my sleep?"

A small man with a thin, weak face, that might have suggested the vacuous countenance of a sheep had it not been for an expression of anguish and childish petulance, sat up among a bunch of furs in the corner of the cabin. He supported himself tremblingly upon an arm and stared with watery, haggard eyes upon Hank, who regarded him wistfully.

Hank was a big man and raw-boned. His big, quiet, hirsute face contrasted strongly with the face of the other. About his waist hung a belt containing a pair of six-shooters. Since the dark had fallen he had been pacing nervously back and forth across the cabin floor, his eyebrows knit, his face twitching, now and then offering a soft word of comfort to the little man who lay among the furs in the corner breathing fitfully.

"Cuss your hide, Hank! You know I hain't

slep' none for a week, and you go on a-trampin' and a-gabbin' till you got me all on needles! Why can't you leave me be? O damn it!"

The last words were more like a sob than a curse; and the white, thin face and quivering lips seemed too impotent for the words. Hank stopped pacing up and down, and with his fists resting upon his hips he stared at the little man.

"Now, Sheep," he drawled kindly, "you hain't got no call to talk that away. Hain't I tryin' to be your friend to the finish? I was just thinkin' to cheer you up so's you'd make a respect'ble, manly hangin'. I didn't go to rile you."

The little man thus addressed as "Sheep" drew himself up into a shivering bunch among the furs and groaned. The big man shook his head slowly and sat down, leaning against the wall of the cabin. "Pore Sheep," he muttered.

For an hour he sat with his chin in his hands, staring with pitying eyes upon the huddled little man, who now and again shook with shuddering sobs. The candle flame flickered dismally in the night wind that came in through the chinks in the wall.

At length a series of stifled groans grew up among the furs, accompanied by a spasmodic jerking of the limbs of the little man. With a deep sigh he sat up. With an imbecile droop of the lower jaw, and eyes that burned feverishly with utter horror, he stared at his companion.

"O cuss you, Hank!" he broke out querulously, "why can't you talk none? You goin' to let me keep a-slippin' down, down, down right into hell and never say a word to me? What you settin' there like a bump on a log for?"

"W'y, Sheep," said the big man kindly; "thought you was tryin' to snooze."

"Snooze! How can I snooze with a million little devils runnin' up and down my backbone and a-dancin' all over my head? You knowed I couldn't sleep! You knowed I hain't slep' for a week! Snooze! O damn it! Hain't I goin' to get plenty of snoozin' when they drag the cart out from 'n under me in the mornin'? "

Sheep's voice broke; the fire went out of his eyes; his teeth chattered as though a sudden gust of winter had struck him.

"Now, Sheep," said Hank, "don't be so riled up like. I know it's hard to go out that away; but it won't last long, and it can't hurt much after the first jerk. I reckon it don't matter much how a feller goes out after he's gone."

"Oh, shut that up!"

The little man leaned against the wall and closed his eyes. After a considerable silence the big man produced a flask of liquor and spoke soothingly.

"Want a drink, Sheepy, old man?"

The little man leaped up with a glimmer of hope in his eyes.

"'Course I do! What made you keep a-hidin'

it when you knowed all along that's what I been wantin'?"

He grasped the flask and drank with great eager gulps until it was empty. Then he sat down against the cabin wall, staring fixedly at the candle flame. The empty, sheepish, cowardly face began to gain expression as the liquor mounted to his head. A light of fearlessness began to grow in his eyes. Lines appeared and deepened in his thin face, suggesting at once a certain degree of mastery and infinite malevolence. The wolf that lurks somewhere in the fastness of every man's soul had come forth and routed the sheep.

"What in thunder you doin' with all that heavy artillery hangin' to you, Hank? Take 'em off! I don't need no guards. Who said I was thinkin' of breakin' camp? I hain't tryin' to run, am I? Damn me, I'm glad I done it and I'm a-goin' to walk right straight into hell a-grinnin'! Sheep, am I?"

The little man laughed a strange laugh that had the snarl of a mad wolf in it; a moment since he had been bleating like a scared lamb.

"You set there and listen. Sheep, sheep, sheep! That's what they all been a-callin' me, but when I get done tellin' you about it, I guess you won't call me no sheep. Hain't a danged one of you big fellers as would 've done it up better 'n me!"

"You've knowed me quite a spell, Hank; and you never knowed no bad of me till now, did you? And I hain't had any easy trail most of the time neither.

When I was jest a little feller goin' to country school back East, the other fellers always picked onto me 'cause I was so easy to pick onto. Never had a fight in my life. Always scared to death of fightin'; sucked it in with my mother's milk, I guess. Used to get off alone and bawl 'cause I couldn't make myself fight.

"Never was a real boy; always a kind of a stray sheep, bleatin' around in lonesome places. Guess I must look like a sheep; anyway the boys called me that; and it stuck. Pretty hard bein' a sheep amongst wolves, Hank!"

"I was always shy and easy scared, Hank. I never owned it to a livin' man before; but a man is like to say things just before he goes out for good that he wouldn't say before.

"You knowed ol' man Leclerc, didn't you? *Her* dad, you know. Used to live down-river half a day's hard walkin'. I reckon that ol' man was about the best friend I ever had, 'ceptin' you, Hank. Kind of seemed to understand me like. Wonder if he's hearin' me now! Don't give a damn if he is! He knowed it wasn't in me to be bad, and he knows I done right. I tell you, Hank, I ain't scared, nor 'shamed nor nothin'. Damn me, I can see Donahan a-dyin' yet, and it does me good, Hank! Does me good!"

The little man's eyes blazed, and his face seemed to take fire from them. But the light died as quickly as it was kindled, like a fire in too little fuel whipped

by a wind too strong. A soft light of reminiscence lingered where the fiercer glow had died.

“Used to go down there pretty often when I could; part to see the ol’ man, and most to see his girl. Nice little thing, Hank; awful nice little thing! Don’t you think so? Good as an angel, too, but weak like a woman can be. I hain’t nothin’ again’ her, Hank—so help me God, I hain’t! I wasn’t the man for her. She’d ought to ’ve had a big, strong, quiet feller what wasn’t afraid of the devil. Some feller like you, Hank—or Donahan.

“Oh, let the hottest fires in hell eat Donahan!”

The little man shook with a passion that seemed grotesque, because it was too big for him.

“And I kep’ goin’ down there, and goin’ down there, till I begun to be happy, Hank. Begun to thinkin’ part of this world was made for me. Begun to thinkin’ about havin’ a woman and babies; and somehow I got to feelin’ bigger and stronger, and not sneakin’ any more.

“Peared like the girl liked me. Never had nothin’ to do with no woman ’cept my mother, you know. Oh, Hank, why can’t a feller be a man when he wants to so bad? I dunno. I tried.

“Well, one time I went down there and ol’ man Leclerc was pretty sick. Said he was a-goin’ to die sure thing. Wheezin’ already and pickin’ at the blankets. Calls me up to him, and after he got done tellin’ me what he was goin’ to do d’rectly, he says: ‘Sheep, my boy, I’ve brought her up as near

like a French lady as I knowed how. She hain't able to hustle for herself, and—well, ain't she a pretty girl? Why the devil don't you ask me for her?"

"And I asked, and the ol' man said 'yes,' and that was his last word, 'cept 'God be with both of you.' Took all his breath to say that, seemed like.

"And so I saw the ol' man under ground and come up here with the girl. Got the missionary, Father Donahan, to do the tyin'. (Oh, damn him!) And then I begun to be happy. Seemed like God heard the ol' man for a spell, tho' his voice was weak when he said it. Now I guess mebbe he didn't hear. Does he always hear, Hank?"

"Dunno," muttered the big man, who sat with his face in his hands; "seems like He ain't out here 't all, sometimes."

"Oh, shut up, will you?" peevishly snapped the little man. "Le' me talk! *You* got plenty of time for talkin'! Le' *me* talk, will you?"

The big man sighed, and the other continued rapidly in a sort of a dazed sing-song voice with little inflection in it, like a man in a trance.

"Big change come over me then; better man all 'round. Factor saw it and sent me on some long trips; seemed to trust me more'n before. But I always done the longest trips in the shortest poss'ble time. Doted on that girl wife, and I guess I was about the happiest feller that ever cussed a pack mule. Used to like to set around the cabin when I

could and watch her skip about the place makin' things comfort'ble like a woman can when she's a mind.

"And by and by I was happier'n ever. That was when the little boy come. Cute little feller, that boy was. Don't you mind? Had blue eyes, and that tickled me half to death, 'cause black eyes is the rule in my fambly and hers, and it seemed like God was tryin' to be kind to me.

"When Father Donahan christened the young'n, I drawed his attention to them blue eyes and Donahan (no, I ain't goin' to call him Father no more, 'cause if he was a priest, he was a priest of the devil!) What was I sayin'?"

At the sound of Donahan's name upon his own lips, the little man's face writhed into malevolent contortions.

"What was I sayin'?" he repeated dazedly.

"Blue eyes," suggested Hank.

"Quit breakin' in onto me that away!" snapped the little man peevishly. "And when I showed him the blue eyes, Donahan grinned and said, 'Yes, God had been very kind.' And it did look like it, didn't it?

"Donahan named the boy; asked me if I'd let him. Called him James for a front name and Donahan for a middle one. Well, things went along smooth until one day the little feller died. Made me feel pretty bad—like to tore my heart out. But Donahan he come and cried too, and that helped. Always helps

to have somebody feel bad with you; don't you think so?

"After that things dragged on like they have a way of doin'. I kep' on tryin' to be like a man. But the girl, she seemed to be takin' it pretty hard. Got stranger and stranger toward me, like as if she didn't care for me no more. Donahan used to come in often and console her, and she seemed to brighten up at them times—'cause she was always strong on the religion business. That's what made her so good, I guess.

"But by and by there was goin' to be another youngster, and I kind of got into the way of whistlin' again somehow. Got to thinkin' how it'd be a boy with blue eyes like the one that died. About that time the Factor sent me off on a long trip. Hated to go, but it couldn't be helped. You'd ought to seen me travel, Hank! Wantin' to get back, you know; 'feared all the time mebbe she was sick and a-wantin' me. Made a quick trip—quicker'n most big men could, Hank. And when I come in sight of home, I was that glad that I couldn't feel my feet and legs achin'.

"It was night when I got back, and I thought I'd just take a peep in at the winder before I went in; light was shinin' out so home-like. You know how a boy looks a long time at a big, red apple before he eats it; gettin' his eyes full of it before he fills his belly? That was like me.

"I crep' up and looked in; winder was raised a

little. I could see Donahan inside and he was talkin' soft and low.

" 'Hope it'll have blue eyes,' he was sayin'; 'blue eyes like mine.' And that made me love Donahan more, 'cause it was just what I was a-wishin' myself. Talked along quite a spell, and me watchin' outside, all the time pityin' Donahan 'cause he couldn't never have no little woman like that and a youngster with blue eyes.

" And the talkin' growded into a mumble and hum like as if I was a-dreamin' it all in a happy dream; until all to onces some of the words leaped out of the hum, and stood out clear like so many candle flames a-burnin' into my head, and a-scorchin' my backbone, and a-settin' the whole world afire with bloody light.

" I held onto the winder sill to keep from fallin' down, and this is what I heard: ' Sometimes I feel sorry for the pore sheep; and I've spent many nights prayin' to God about it and askin' him to forgive me. Then when I see you again, it all comes back and the prayers are no more than so many curses. What'd you ever marry that sheep for? Curse the day that I was made a priest! '

" And then the words seemed to get muffled, only now and then I could hear some of 'em plain, and every one of 'em was like a big man's fist drivin' into my face and a-beatin' my eyes full of blood."

The little man covered his face with his hands and sobbed.

" O, I ain't a-blamin' her, Hank," he blubbered.

"Never was a better woman. I ain't blamin' her."

He rocked himself back and forth for some time. His sobbing ceased. Suddenly he raised his face and the flames of hell glittered in his tear-washed eyes.

"I'm a white-livered coward, so I didn't go in and kill him. He was a big man, and I ain't no fighter. I run; don't know why. Didn't feel sore nor achy in my legs no more. I run and run and run till my breath give out, then I fell down and the stars swum 'round and went out. Then after awhile I was up and walkin', and nothin' would stand still. Things danced round and round me and the air was full of little spiteful, spittin' lights and sounds like devils a-laughin'. And by and by I come to ol' man Leclerc's place. Don't know why I went there. Nothin' there but the *place*.

"I went in and laid down on the floor all broke up. And when I went to sleep, I dreamed of killin' Donahan. I woke up and it was mornin'.

"First thing I heard was the rattle of some Red River carts goin' north. I guess it was the devil that whispered somethin' in my ear then. I run out and told a big lie to the bull-whackers. 'Man a-dyin' in here! Go as fast as you can to the next post and tell Father Donahan to come down to see the pore devil through with it!'

"Guess I looked like I'd been settin' up for a

week, so the bull-whackers believed it and went on north a-whackin' their bulls into a swingin' trot.

"Well, Donahan come all right."

Here the little man lapsed into a stubborn silence. He leaned against the wall and for several hours there was no sound in the cabin but that of heavy breathing.

At length Hank got up and walked over to the little window. A dull grey blur had grown up in the East. It would soon be time. Hank sighed.

Suddenly the little man was aroused from his lethargy as though he had heard a shout. He began talking rapidly.

"I stood behind the door of the cabin, and when he come in I downed him with a club. Then I tied his hands and his feet and fastened him to the floor. I sat beside him and spit in his face till he come to a-groanin'. And it was a couple days before he could talk sense or knowed who I was.

"And he begged and he cussed, but I didn't say nothin'. He got hungry; so I chawed at some pemmican I had left from the trip so's he'd get hungrier. He got thirsty; so I drank more'n I wanted so's he'd get thirstier.

"Said he'd get me into heaven for just one sup of water; so I went out with my cup; I filled it with dust; I put it to his lips.

"Said he'd send me to hell if I didn't give him just one drop. So I give him more dust. And by and

by he got luny like, and cussed like a bull-whacker and whined like a sick woman by turns.

“God, Hank! How that man hung on!

“And by and by he seemed to get a little sense for a spell, and he yelled out: ‘*He had blue eyes, didn’t he? Look at mine!*’ And I cuffed him in the mouth till his teeth was bloody, ‘cause his eyes was blue.”

The little man hesitated. Suddenly an expression of supreme terror came over his face. The wolf was dead—the frightened sheep looked out of his eyes. There was a sound of footsteps. The shabby light of early dawn had already cheapened the glow of the guttered candle.

The door opened—a priest entered.

The little man gave a yell of terror and shrank into his corner.

“*Take it away, Hank!*” he screamed. “*Take it away!*”

Hank spoke a few words into the ear of the priest, who muttered a prayer and went out. For some time the little man stared appealingly into the eyes of the bigger man. When he spoke his voice was husky and low: “Won’t you look after the woman a little, Hank? If it’s got blue eyes——”

There was now a sound of other footsteps approaching. The little man gasped like one who has suddenly been thrust into cold water.

“Oh, Hank!” he moaned; “hold me tight. Don’t let ‘em take me! They’ll stand me in the cart under

a tree and they'll put the rope around my neck and they'll drag the cart away! *Oh!*"

The footsteps were now very near the door. The little man on a sudden became very quiet. He bit nervously at his finger-tips. His body stiffened. His face seemed transparent.

When the sound of a hand at the latch was heard, his jaw dropped nervelessly. He stared upon the soon-to-be-opened door with wide, dilated eyes, in which all that had been human was burned to dust.

XII

THE MARK OF SHAME

IN the old times there were two brothers, Seha and Ishneda; and because of hate for him, they did many acts of unkindness to a man whose name was Shonga Saba.

And one night a man was killed and the man was Ishneda. So with the coming of the light, a whisper ran about the village, saying "Shonga Saba has killed." And the whisper was true; for Shonga Saba sat in his lodge all day, speaking no word. And when any came to speak, he lifted his lip in a bad way and snarled. A sick wolf does so.

It happened that morning that some hunters went forth, for it was the time for the hunting of bison and the tribe was resting on the trail. And when the hunters returned, their eyes were like the eyes of a scared deer. They told a story that frightened the people. They had shot at three elk and their aim was true; but the arrows came out on the other side—bloodless. And the elk changed into wolves, running away very swiftly.

So they who were wise saw famine coming. They recalled old times; how the game had often failed after a murder. For the spirit of the dead man makes it so. And the wise old men told these things,

and the old women said it had been so; they remembered.

So there was a space of little speaking, for Fear sat upon tongues.

When the sun was going down, the people gathered about the big chief's tepee where the fathers were sitting with great thoughts. They did not smoke nor talk. They shivered as the long shadows crept out of the hills—yet it was the brown hot time.

And when it was dusk a chief made words which were whispers: "Let a *wachoobay* [holy man] take strong weapons and travel the back trail till the middle of the night, that he may meet the spirit that comes and kill it; for Famine walks with the spirit that comes, and there shall be the wailing of children and many flat bellies."

And the *wachoobay* went forth with strong weapons. He took the back trail; he looked straight ahead. And the people stared after him until the dark came between, as he walked to meet the two comers.

Then the chief's voice went over the people in the darkness, for the fires were not lit; an enemy was coming, and there is safety in darkness: "Let him who killed come among us." So one went and brought the man.

He stood among the people, felt but not seen; and with him came a sobbing that grew into words: "I, Shonga Saba, am here; and I have killed. Have my people seen a bison bull stung with

a fly until he tore the earth with his horns? It was so. After a long time of heat the storm comes out of the night; it does angry deeds, and in the morning it is past. It was so. My breast aches. I struck my enemy, but myself I struck also. Something has died within me. So I go to do as the others have done. I will take the punishment."

And though the people did not hear nor see him go, they knew that he was gone. That night only the children slept.

When Shonga Saba reached his tepee, he did that which was the custom. He cut his hair, he took off his garments, he smeared his forehead with mud. Of tears and dust he made the mud. Upon his forehead he put the mark of his shame.

From the peak of his tepee, where the smoke comes out, he tore the rawhide flap. It was blackened with the smoke of many fires. About his shoulders he bound it; and it was the garment of his shame.

And then he went forth from the camp. He pitched a lonesome tepee without the circle of his people; for thus he should live four summers and four winters. It was the custom.

And in the first light his woman came to him with water and cooked meat. Also, she brought moaning. Shonga Saba spoke no word nor looked up. The mud of tears and dust was upon his forehead, and the blackened garment of shame was upon his shoulders. There was a lump in his throat; but the

water did not wash it away. There was an emptiness in him; but the meat did not fill it. And when he cut the meat, which was well cooked, the man groaned, for blood ran forth and made the food look like a wound.

Again the tribe took up the trail; they wanted to find the bison, for there was little meat. And the man followed at the distance of an arrow's flight behind his moving people, for such was the custom. But no thunder of bison came from the brown valleys where the trail went; neither was there any dust cloud of pawing hoofs. And the old women remembered old-time famines, and their hands trembled as they pitched the tepees in the dusk that ended the day's toil.

And in the mornings the old men gazed into the shining distance, looking from under their hands with eyes that glared as in battle. And all day, sweating and toiling on the trail, the people ate the distance with hungry eyes.

Round bellies flattened; for the evil days had come.

And the man who had killed saw all this. He too walked with hunger and something bigger than the food-wish. Also lonesomeness was ever by his side. In the nights he felt the mark upon his forehead like the sting of an angry knife; and the smoke-flap was as a fire upon his shoulders.

And one night he said: "I have brought these days of toiling without food upon my people. It

was for this that my mother groaned at my coming. I should have been the food of wolves on that day when my eyes were not yet open. I will go away, for evil walks with me, and my feet scatter trouble in the trail. My woman is as one who has no man, and my children are as a stranger's children. I will walk far and seek peace among other peoples, among strange hills and valleys."

And he went in the night.

He was far into the lonesome places—and it was morning. He was weak with the night walking, for famine had made him thin. So he lifted his face and his hands to the sun. His palms he turned to the young light and he spoke earnest words to the Spirit: "Wakunda, trouble have I met, and trouble have my people met through me. Help me to walk in the good trail!"

And as he said the words, a cloud passed across the sun; it was like a smutch of mud across a shining forehead. The man who had killed, groaned. He hid his face in the grass that he might not see the mark of his shame. But as the day grew older the hunger pinched more, and the man got up, set his face away from the sun, and went on further into the lonesome places. And in the evening he killed a rabbit with his bow and arrows. And as the rabbit leaped up at the sting of the arrow, it made a pitiful sound like that of a man struck deep with a knife in his sleep.

And the man fled, for a strange sickness had

gripped him. The mark upon his forehead burned, and the smoke-flap was as a heavy burden upon his shoulders.

In the last light he found wild turnips and ate. They could not cry out; they could not bleed. And then sleep came, but not rest. While his body slept, his spirit killed Ishneda over and over again. And he saw the first light with haggard eyes.

And when he had eaten again of the wild turnips he said: "I will go to the village of the Poncas; they will take me in, for I will speak soft words." That day he travelled, and the next and the next. But two others had travelled faster than he—Famine and the Story of his bad deed; for none travel so fast as these. And these two had travelled across the prairie together.

And after much walking, Shonga Saba came to the top of a hill and turned hungry eyes upon the Ponca village in the valley. It was the time when the old day throws big shadows. He stood thin, bent against the sky. The smoke-flap at his shoulders lifted in the wind that the eyes in the valley might see.

And a dead hush crept over the village; the sound of children died; the people disappeared. Full of wonder and fear, the lean, lonesome one walked with halting step down the dry hillside. He entered the village, and it was as a place where all are dead.

He came to the centre of the village. He lifted his palms and made a piteous cry, which was like a

dry wind moving in a wilderness. And then the head of an old man was thrust forth from a tent-flap, and from it came a husky voice: "Begone, O Bringer of Famine!"

And the man went forth. His head was bent, his shoulders stooped as with a weight. He walked far and met the Night. He lay down in its shadow. His forehead ached, and the smoke-flap was as a burning brand. And in the darkness he made a cry: "Wakunda, very far have I walked seeking peace; but it has fled before me. Help me to find the good trail!"

He was very tired, and on a sudden it was day again, and the dew was upon him. He found wild turnips and ate. He drank at a little creek that ran very thin among dying reeds. Then he walked, he knew not where. But now and then he whispered bitter words into the lonesome air: "In the land of the spirits is peace; there I would walk, but I cannot find the trail."

The day was very hot. The prairie wavered in the heat; the bugs droned; the light wind sighed in the dry grasses like a thirsty thing. The far hills seemed floating in a lake of thin oil. They looked lean and hungry, yellow as with a fever; and upon their sides the dry earth was broken like old sores.

Into the heat-drone the man sent his sighing. His feet were heavy; he wished to die, he wished to die.

And when the day was past the highest place, a rumbling grew below the rim of the earth, like the

galloping of many bison—a sound of anger. And a cloud arose, black and flashing with fires across its front. The sky was as an eye of fever and the cloud closed slowly over it like a big eyelid.

Then a hush fell. There was no moving of air, no droning of bugs. The prairie held its breath; and the cloud came on. It moved in silence. It threw long, ragged arms ahead of it, long, eager arms. And out of it leaped flames, like the spurt and sputter of a wind-blown camp fire in the night.

And in the hush the man heard strange sounds on a sudden. There was a crying and a shouting of battle cries. He reached the bald top of a hill and saw below him a fighting of many warriors. Bitterly they fought, as wolves fight in hunger. There was the lifting and falling of war clubs, the shrieking of arrows. Sounds of horror cut the big stillness like many knives.

And the man's heart leaped with joy—for here was death; this was the beginning of the trail that led to peace.

With a cry he rushed from the summit. He ran with very young legs to meet Death, for he wished to die.

But on a sudden the warring bands ceased crying. The war clubs were not lifted, the arrows flew no more. On rushed the thin, bent runner from the hilltop, and the smoke-flap flaunted itself behind him. As in a dream the warriors stared upon the wild runner. Then a hoarse shout went up: "The Fam-

ine Bringer! The Famine Bringer!" Stricken with a common fear, they fled. And the storm broke upon the valley. It poured down water and fire upon one who lay there upon his face. It roared, it shrieked, it flamed about him; but he moved not.

His breast ached with the ache of the lonesome, for even Death had fled him. And when the storm had passed, the stillness came back like a new pain. The drenched man arose and saw the blood-red sun slip down a ridge of steaming hills.

And near him lay one who had been killed with an arrow. The feathers stood forth from his breast. His face had the look of much pain; his hands gripped at the wet grass. And the lonesome one looked long upon the dead man, thinking deep thoughts. "Even the dead have pain," he said, "and they seek to hold to the good earth. See how he clutches it! I shall live and follow my trail, for on all trails there is pain; and Wakunda wishes me to live."

So he dressed himself in the garments of the dead warrior who needed them no more. He threw away the smoke-flap, and in a gully that roared with rapid waters, he washed the smutch from his forehead—the mud of dust and tears. And he said: "Now will I walk straight again, for the marks of my shame are gone. I will seek the Otoes, and they will take me in."

Is it not the way of a man to seek better things? And it happened that in the village of the Otoes

was much joy and much feasting. For the bison had come back; the famine was ended.

And it was dark. The lonesome one sighted the feast fires from far off and caught the far-blown scent of boiling kettles. They had the home-smell. His heart was glad as he entered the village and went in among the feast fires. And they about the fires said: "Who walks in from the night?" And Shonga Saba said: "A lonesome man, one with many stories to tell."

They sat him down, for stories are good with feasting. And he told a story while the meat went round and the kettles simmered and the embers crackled and went blue. And as he told, the people gathered close about to hear. They leaned forward, they breathed heavily, they stared. For his story was of a brave one who suffered much; it sounded true; there was an ache in his words. Also it had in it the muttering of war drums, the wails of women in the night, the snarl of bow thongs, the beat of hoofs.

But as the teller raised his face, glowing with the noble deeds of which he told, he saw the circled mass of staring faces, moulded with the terrors of the tale and lit blue with falling embers.

What did they see that they stared so? *The mark!*

The story-teller leaped to his feet. As a wounded man he cried out: "It is not washed away!" He threw his arms across his forehead and fled through the parting throng into the night.

And when he had run far from something that followed yet made no sound, he cast himself down on the prairie and cried to the Spirit: "Wakunda, with water I washed it away, but it is not gone! Am I a wolf to howl always in the wilderness? I have the ache for home. I wish to hear laughter and be clean. Help me to find the trail!"

All night his words felt about in the dark for Wakunda.

The next day his wanderings began anew. And after many sunlights the first frost gripped the prairie, and the snows came. More and more the lonesome one thought of the fires of his people. Through the shivering nights the tang of the home-smoke filled his nostrils; and day by day the home-ache grew.

So his weary feet followed his longing, and the trail led home. But there was no greeting. In an empty lodge without the village he made a fire that held the winter off but left him shivering. And once again his woman came with sobbing and a downcast face, bringing water and meat. He ate and drank, yet thirst and hunger stayed. In the nights he looked wistfully upon the fires of his people burning little days out of the darkness. He wished to be beside them and hear the laughter, for the famine had passed, and there was joy.

And often by day, Seha, the brother of the man who was killed, came with taunting and words that wounded as a whip-thong. But the lonesome one

made no answer, for having suffered much, he was wise. And this was against the law of the fathers; so it happened one day that Seha was bound to a post in the centre of the village, and the whippers were there with elkhorn whips to punish Seha.

Then was a strange deed done, which even yet the old men tell of to the youths. From his lodge ran the lonesome one and stood before the whippers. The long silence he broke with words: "Spare Seha and bind me to the post, for mine was the bad deed. I have suffered much and now I can see."

And the old fathers, who were wise, said: "Let it be as the man says." And it was done. The lonesome one was bound to the post and took the lashes on his back. He made no cry, nor was there any wincing of his face. And it happened that in his pain he sought out the face of Seha in the throng. It was no longer hard with hate.

And then, suddenly, as the whips hissed about him, a light went across the face of the lonesome one—a strange, bright light. And seeing this, the arms of the whippers faltered, for it was very strange.

Then in the silence that fell, the man raised a soft voice: "At last the mark has left me! Bring my children to look upon me, and let my woman sing! I have found peace; for the mark of tears and dust is gone—I know not how."

XIII

THE BEATING OF THE WAR DRUMS

HE could never be a strong *waschusha* (brave). When he was born he was no bigger than a baby coyote littered in a terrible winter after a summer of famine! That was what the braves said as they sat in a circle about the fires; and often one would catch him, spanning his little brown legs with a contemptuous forefinger and thumb, while the others made much loud mirth over this bronze mite who could never be a brave.

Then the object of their mirth would pull away from his tormentors, displaying his teeth with a whimper that was half a growl, and would slink away into the shades where the firelight did not reach. Whereupon the braves would call after him in their good-natured cruelty: "Mixa Zhinga! Mixa Zhinga!" (Little Wolf).

So, in accordance with certain infallible psychic laws, Little Wolf became what he was considered, and fulfilled his wild name to the letter.

One day in one of his most vulpine moods, while trotting among the hills on all fours, stopping now and then to sit upon his haunches and give forth a series of howls in imitation of his namesakes, he had discovered a deserted wolf's hole in the hillside, of

which he immediately made himself the growling possessor.

To make this play metempsychosis the more real, he had spirited from the tepee of his father a complete wolf's hide, clad in which he spent the greater part of the time prowling about among the hills with an intense wolfish hate for all humankind gnawing at his heart.

One summer evening Little Wolf, sitting upon the top of the hill, gazed down upon the circle of tepees which was the village of his people. As he looked, the silent vow he had taken, never to go back to his tribe again, but to be a wolf with the wolves, slowly became shapeless, then indistinct, then it vanished altogether. For the smoke, rising slowly from the various fires, told a bewitching tale of supper to his eyes; and the light wind brought to his keen nostrils the scent of boiling kettles, which acted as a sort of footnote to the tale of the smoke, finally clinching the argument of the text!

So the little wolf fell from his high resolve as the wolf skin fell from his back, and he forthwith trotted down the hillside, at every step degenerating, as he thought, into just a common *zhinga zhinga* (baby).

Having cautiously approached a fire, Little Wolf sat upon the ground with his knees huddled up to his chin, and watched the deft hands of the women tending the baking of the squaw corn cakes and the yellow *watuh* (pumpkin) in the embers.

The old women, their backs bent with their loads,

carried bundles of faggots from a thicket near by and placed them upon the fires, that flared up with a sound like the wind's, making a small circular day amid the gathering shadows. The air was pleasant with the scent of boiling kettles, some filled with the meat of the *tae* or the *tachuga* (bison and antelope); some ebullient with the savoury *zhew munka*, the tea of the prairie. And as Little Wolf sat and looked upon the suggestive scene, a great wave of sympathetic kindness passed through his small body.

And especially did the wolfishness of his little heart melt into an indefinite feeling of love for humanity as his eyes followed the form of the maiden Hinnagi as she bustled with her mother about the kettles. Already in his childish mind he was wielding the stone axe with mighty force in some mysterious battle among the hills; and it was all for her. His eyes grew big with the dream he was dreaming. He stared into the fire as he thought the thoughts of ambitious youth.

The flame fell and crept into the embers. Then reality came back as the shadows came. Something of the wonted wolfishness tugged at his heart as he thought of what the braves had said. He could never be a strong brave! With an awful bitterness this thought grew upon him, and even a full stomach could not quite ease the pang.

After the evening meal the war drums were brought into the open space about which the tepees were built. For upon the morrow the entire band

of the tribe's warriors would go out against their enemies, the Sioux, and to-night they would dance the war dance that their courage might not fail.

The drums were placed in a small circle; before each an old man, who had seen many battles ere the eagle glance faded from his eye, sat cross-legged, holding a drumstick in either hand. About these the braves gathered in a larger circle. The yellow and red light of the boisterous camp fires made more terrible their faces fierce with the war paint.

In another circle at some distance from that of the braves, awaited the women, dressed in their brightest garments of dyed buckskin. At a signal from the head chief of the tribe, the snarling thunder of the war drums began. The two motionless circles suddenly became two rings of gyrating colour. The beaded moccasins twinkled like a chain of satellites swinging about the faggot fire for a sun. The shout of the braves arose above the cadence of the drum beats, and the monotonous song of the women grew like a night wind in a lonesome valley.

Tum-tum-um-um, tum-tum-um-um, went the drums, ever faster, ever louder, inciting the dancers to delirious fury. The neglected fires dwindled into embers. The shout of the braves and the droning of the women ceased. Darkness fell upon the circles. The dancers moved swiftly through the dusk like ghosts in a midnight orgy. There was no sound save the snarling beat of the drums and the shuffle of wild feet.

Then the moon, big-eyed with wonder, arose above the hills, pouring a weird light upon the dance. Little Wolf, who had been huddling closely against a tepee with an unintelligible fear, now felt the delirium of the dance for the first time. He leaped to his feet with a shout that echoed strange and hoarse from the hills! The whole village, as if awakened from the spell, caught up the cry and sent it trembling up the gulches!

With the hot blood pounding at his temples, Little Wolf swung into the frenzy of the dance. He leaped like the antelope when it catches the scent of the hunter. He was no longer the *zhinga zhinga* who could never be a brave. The fanaticism of the savage was upon him. With his head thrown back until it caught the full glare of the moon, he danced. It was not a child's face that the pale light struck; it was the face of a fiend! The unfettered wind of the prairie was in his lungs! The swiftness of the elk was in his feet! He danced until the hills danced about him in a dance of their own. He danced until the moon reeled like a sick man! He danced until his chest felt crushed as with the hug of a grizzly! He danced until the stars and the moon went out, and there was nothing but darkness and a deep, deep oppressive something, like and unlike slumber, upon him! The sun was far up in the heavens when he awoke lying upon the ground where he had fallen with fatigue. He rubbed his eyes and stared about him; the circles of the dance had vanished; the war drums

were still. The warriors had ridden out of the village into the mysterious region beyond the hills where great deeds awaited to be done. Only the women and the children and the old men remained in the village.

Then there came upon Little Wolf that overpowering thought of bitterness. He was only a *zhinga zhinga*; he could never be a brave. No, but he would be a wolf! He would live in howling loneliness among the hills!

Yet that day as he prowled about, clad in his wolf skin, he was conscious of not being half so good a wolf as he had been the day before. He did not find it quite within his power to hate his people with whom he had felt the delirium of the war dance. The snarling beat of the war drums had awakened in him a vital interest in the great prairie tragedy of food-getting and war-making.

Several days passed, and the warriors had not returned. Little Wolf was sitting beside the deserted hole which was his den, thinking great thoughts of the future as he basked in the horizontal glare of the evening sun. As he looked with half-shut eyes across the hills, his dreaming was suddenly arrested by the sight of what seemed a number of bunches of grass moving along the brow of the hill on the other side of the valley in which the village lay. As he looked and wondered at this fantastic dance of the grasses, there was a wild shout from the opposite hill, and a small band of Otoes, their heads covered with grass

that they might the more easily creep upon their foes, rushed down the hillside toward the defenceless village.

Terrified by the suddenness of the attack, Little Wolf scampered into his hole like any other little wolf, and crouched in the darkness shivering with fear. Some time passed, during which he could hear the wail of the women and the victorious cries of the Otoes; then the noises ceased. With a great pang of remorse, the consciousness of his cowardice came upon Little Wolf. He had crawled into a hole like a badger!

Then he thought of Hinnagi.

He crawled out of the hole and ran down the hill into the village with his wolf skin still upon him. There amid the tepees he saw the bodies of some of the old men who had attempted resistance, but the time of their strength was passed.

“Hinnagi! Hinnagi!” called Little Wolf. He listened, and heard only the wail of the women from the lodges.

It was the custom of the Otoes to carry off the fairest daughters of the enemy as the spoil of war. Little Wolf thought of this with a great pang at his heart. A great indefinite resolve of heroism came upon him. He ran out of the village and down the valley, keeping the trail of the enemy. When he had gone some distance, he came upon some ponies that the Otoes had abandoned for the fresher ones from the herds of the Omahas.

Catching one of these, weary with a long trail, he mounted it and turned its head down the trail of the Otoes, urging its weary limbs into a gallop by plying his heels upon its ribs.

The shades of the valley crept slowly up the hills and the golden glow faded from the summits. Little Wolf still urged the stumbling pony through the darkness. As he rode, the frenzy that he had felt in the war dance rushed through him. His temples beat and his heart throbbed to the time of the snarling drums. To him the night breeze seemed heavy with noble deeds awaiting to be given life and voices of thunder for the ears of men.

He felt that in some indefinite way he would now become a strong *waschusha!* The Otoes had stolen the ponies and the women; ah, that included Hinnagi! He would save them; little did he know how, yet he felt that he would save them. Then the braves would not laugh at him any more, but would let him ride to battle with them. And maybe sometime Hinnagi would be his squaw!

Suddenly rounding the base of a hill, the pony stopped short and pricked up its ears, sniffing the wind that came up the gulch. Little Wolf, aroused from his musing, soon understood the abruptness of the pony. He smelled smoke! Slipping to the ground he crawled on his hands and knees up the gulch in the direction from which the scent of the smoke came.

Soon he reached the end of the gulch and, looking

into a small valley, he saw through the gloom a number of rudely constructed tepees. Breathlessly he listened. For awhile there was no sound except the crackling of the low fires and the flap of the blankets about the poles. Then as he listened, there came to his ears a low, mournful wail as of a night wind in the scrub oaks of a bluff.

Having satisfied himself that the Otoes slept soundly, Little Wolf crawled in the direction of the wail and disappeared in the gloom.

Some moments afterward, an Otoe brave suddenly awoke from his heavy slumber. In the weird glow of the falling fire he beheld at the entrance of his tepee a grey wolf standing motionless.

The brave raised himself upon his elbow, uttering a grunt of terror as of one who feels a nightmare and would cry out were not his tongue frozen in his mouth.

The wolf with a startled movement whispered hoarsely in the Omaha tongue: "The Omahas! They are coming! Fly! Fly!"

The Otoe brave leaped to his feet, every limb growing cold with fright. He rubbed his eyes and stared at the darkness. The wolf had vanished.

Now an Indian believes weird things, and the warning of a talking wolf was not a thing to be despised even though it were only dreamed. So the Otoe brave gave a shout that rang up the gulch and made the grazing ponies snort and tug at their lariats.

Soon the entire band was rushing about the camp.

"The Omahas! They are coming!" cried the startled brave. "Fly! Fly! For lo, a grey wolf came to my tepee and spoke to me in a dream!"

"Fly! Fly!" echoed the whole band, delirious with fear. "Kill the squaws!" they shouted; for in their flight they could not be burdened with their spoils, and they would not leave them to their enemies.

There was the sound of the shrieks of women; then the galloping of hoofs; then silence.

Two days afterward the Omahas, having returned to their stricken village, made the trail of the fleeing Otoes thunderous with pursuing hoofs. Suddenly topping the hill that overlooked the deserted camp of their enemies, they beheld the bodies of the slain women strewn amid the tepees. Over one of these a grey wolf stood.

There was a shout from the foremost of the Omaha warriors, and a dozen arrows sang in the air and quivered in the body of the wolf. It rolled upon its side with a cry half human!

A group of braves, riding up to the corpse of the woman, pulled the blanket from its face.

It was Hinnagi!

With a savage kick one turned the still quivering body of the wolf upon its back. The grey hide fell from an emaciated brown face, twitching with the agony of death.

It was Little Wolf!

XIV

DREAMS ARE WISER THAN MEN

RAIN WALKER lay upon the brown grass without the circle of the village; and it was the time when the maize is gathered—the brown, drear time. He lay with ear pressed to the earth.

“What are you doing?” asked one who walked there.

“I?” said Rain Walker; and his eyes and face were not good to see as he raised his head. The dying time seemed also in his face. “The growers are coming up, and I am listening to their breathing,” he said.

And the questioner walked on with a strange smile; for it was not the time of the coming of the growers.

Rain Walker stood in the centre of the village and held his face to the sky.

“What are you doing?” said one who walked there.

“I?” and there was twilight in Rain Walker’s eyes as he looked upon the questioner. “I shot an arrow into the air. It did not come back, so I am always looking for it.”

And the questioner smiled and went on walking;

for no arrow rises that does not fall. A child knows that.

And the people said: "It is all because Mad Buffalo, the Ponca, took his squaw. He took her, and she went. It was after the summer's feasting and talking together that she went. Rain Walker is not forgetting."

And Rain Walker sat much alone; he sat much alone making strange songs not pleasant to hear. And as he made songs he made weapons. He fashioned him a *man-de-hi*, which is a long spear, tipped with sharp flint; and he sang. He wrought a *za-zi-man-di*, which is a great bow; and sang all the time. They were hate songs that he sang; they snarled.

He shaped many arrows; he headed them with sharp flints and tipped them with the feathers of the hawk; and all the time he sang. He made a *we-ak-ga-di*, which is an ugly club. He sang to himself and to the weapons that he made. To the harsh, snarling airs he wrought the weapons. The songs went into them, and they looked like things that might hate much.

And one drew near who was walking. "Why do you make war things?" said he.

"I?" and Rain Walker threw himself upon his stomach, writhing toward the questioner like a big snake. "I am a rattlesnake," he said, "*hiss-ss-ss-s!* go away! I sting!"

And the man went, for it is not good to see a man act like a snake.

And one night the weapons were finished. All that night the people heard the voice of Rain Walker singing. They said: "Those are the songs of one who wishes to go on the warpath!"

And in the morning Rain Walker came out of his lodge. The squaws trembled to see him; and the men wondered. For he had wept and his eyes were pale. Well did the men know that he who weeps in hate is not a child.

And Rain Walker raised a hoarse voice into the morning stillness before all the people: "Where is my woman—she who cooked for me and made my lodge pleasant? Tell me; for I walk there that the crows may eat me!"

The people shivered as though his voice were the breath of the first frost.

"You need not make words, my kinsmen; I know. I walk there and the crows shall eat me."

He went forth from the door of his lodge and came to the place where the head chief lived among the Hungas. He raised the door flap. "A-ho!" said he, for the chief was within eating. "I, Rain Walker, stand before you. I have words to give."

"Speak," said the chief.

"I am wronged. I wish war! I wish to see the Poncas destroyed!"

The head chief gazed long into the tear-washed eyes of Rain Walker, and he said: "It is a big thing to take that trail. It means the wailing of women;

it means hunger; it means the crying of *zhinga zhingas* for fathers that lie in lonesome places and never ride back. It is a hard path to take. I will think."

And it happened after the thinking of the big chief that a council was called—a coming-together of the leaders of the bands.

And the leaders came together, and sat with big thoughts. It was evening, and among the assembled leaders sat Rain Walker. His face was thin and cruel as a stone axe stained with blood.

Then the big chief raised his voice, and words to be heard grew there in the big lodge. "This man who sits with us has been wronged. When our brothers, the Poncas, were among us for the feasting and the talking together, Mad Buffalo was among them.

"A woman is a thing not to be understood. Now she dies on long winter trails for a man, or grows old and wrinkled suckling his *zhinga zhingas*; and now she leaves him for another; yet it is the same woman. I knew a wise man once; but he shook his head about these things; and so do I.

"You know of whom I speak. It was Sun Eyes; and she was this man's woman. Mad Buffalo smiled, and she went with him."

Rain Walker's breath, that hissed through his teeth, filled up the silence that followed. His face was thin and sharp and eager, even as the barbed head of a war arrow.

"And this man has come to me crying for war," continued the head chief. "Think hard, and let us talk together."

And he of the Big Elk band said: "Let the Poncas come down in the night and drive away our ponies, and I will gather my band about me. But it has not been so."

And he of the Hawk band said: "Let the Poncas destroy our gardens, and I will think of my weapons."

And he of the No-Teeth band said: "Let the Poncas speak ill of us, and my band will put on the war paint."

Then a silence grew and the head chief filled it with few words. "Let us pass the pipe; and all who smoke it smoke for war."

And there were ten chiefs in the council, sitting in a circle. The first touched the pipe lightly and passed it on as though it burned his fingers; and so the second and third, even to the tenth. And next to him sat Rain Walker. His breath came drily through his teeth, like a hot wind in a parched gulch. With hands that trembled he grasped the pipe from the tenth, who had not placed it to his lips. Rain Walker placed it to his lips nervously, eagerly, as one who touches a cool water bowl after a long thirst. He struck a flint and lit it. Then he arose to his feet, tall, straight, trembling—a Rage grown into a man!

"*I smoke!*" he cried; "I smoke, and through all

the sunlights that come I shall walk alone and kill!
The lonesome walker—I am he!

“I shall speak to the snake, and he shall teach me his creeping and his stinging. I shall speak to the elk, and he shall teach me his fleetness, his strength that lasts, his fury when he turns to fight. And I shall speak to the hawk and learn the keenness of his eyes!”

Rain Walker puffed blue streamers of smoke into the still twilight of the lodge, seeming something more than man in the fog he made.

“I smoke!” he cried; and his cry had changed into a song of snarling sounds and sounds that wailed. “I smoke, and I smoke alone; my brothers will not take the pipe with me. In lonesome places shall I walk with my hate, and not even the lone hawk in the furthest hills shall hear me make aught but a hate cry. I have no longer any people! I am a tribe—the tribe that walks alone! The *zhinga zhingas* of the women that are not yet born shall hear my name, and it shall be like a nightwind wailing when the spirits walk and the fires are blue! I will forget that I am the son of a woman; I will think myself the son of a snake, that bore me on a hot rock in a lonesome place. I will think that I never tasted woman’s milk, but only venom stewed by the hot sun. And now I walk alone.”

His cry had fallen to a low wail that made the flesh of the hearers creep, although they were leaders and brave. And with eyes that peered far ahead as

into impenetrable distances Rain Walker strode out of the lodge. The night was coming; he went forth to meet it, walking.

As he walked toward the night his thoughts were of *choobay* (holy) things. He thought much of the spirits, and he reached a high hill as he walked. It was high; therefore it was a *choobay* place. And he climbed to the summit, bare of grass and white with flaked rocks against the sky, that darkened fast as the Night walked.

Then he lit his pipe and made *choobay* smoke. He wished to have the good *wakundas* with him, even though he walked alone. For well he knew that no man can walk quite alone. So he extended the pipe stem to the west, the south, the east, the north, and he cried, "O you who cause the four winds to reach a place, help me! I stand needy!" Then he extended the pipe stem toward the earth, and he said, "O Venerable Man who lives at the bottom, here I stand needy!" And to the heavens he held the stem and cried, "O Grandfather who lives above, I stand needy; I, Rain Walker! Though my brothers treat me badly, yet I think you will help me!"

And he felt much stronger.

Then, with his weapons about him, he set his face to the south, for there in the flat lands of Nebraska lay the village of the Poncas.

And he walked in lonesome places all night. A coyote trotted past him and sat at some distance. "O brother Coyote," said Rain Walker, "I am on

the warpath; teach me your long running and your snapping!" The coyote whined and went into a gulch.

"I walk alone, and none relieve my sorrow!"

So sang Rain Walker; and singing thus he walked into the morning. And the prairie was grey with frost and very big, and the skies were filled with a quiet, so that a far crow cawing faintly made a shout. Having nothing to eat he sang, and hunger went away. His song filled the world, for he walked alone where it was very silent.

To the hawk he cried for keenness of eyes; but the hawk circled on and was only a speck. Nothing heard the man who walked alone.

He killed a rabbit and ate; he found a stream and drank. Then he met the Night walking again, and they walked together until they met the Day; and the man saw below him in the flat lands of Nebraska the jumbled mud village of the Poncas.

And it happened that the people in the village were moving very early. There was a neighing of ponies and a shouting of men and a scolding and laughing of women. It was the time of the bison hunt, and they were going forth that day.

Rain Walker lay in the brown grass at the hilltop and watched with wistful eyes the merry ones as the long, thin file left the village, the riders and the walkers and the drags. It is pleasant to go on the hunt. Rain Walker felt that he would never go again.

His face softened; then suddenly it changed and

became again as a barbed war arrow. Mad Buffalo rode, and after him went Sun Eyes walking! Her head hung low like a thing wilted by the frost. She laughed none; she, too, seemed as one who walked alone.

When the long, thin line, like a huge snake writhing westward into the hills, had disappeared, Rain Walker got up and walked fast. He walked fast, for he wished to be near the place of camping when the night came. And it was so.

He lay at a distance, watching the fires flare into the night and feeling very hungry, for he caught the scent of the boiling kettles. They smelled like home. And when the people had eaten and the fires had fallen, Rain Walker said, "Now I will begin my war. I need a pony, the Poncas have them."

He crawled upon his hands and knees to where the herd grazed. There had been no watch set, for all the tribes were at peace, except the tribe that walked alone.

And Rain Walker rode away into the night. He had big thoughts as he rode.

The hunting was poor that year; it happened so, they say. Still toward the place where the evening goes went the tribe, peering into far places for the bison; and ever there was one who crept near the tepees at night and heard the words of the Poncas, which are the same as the Omahas speak.

And they wandered, hunting, in the places where the sandhills are—the dreary places.

And one day it happened, they say, that a coyote and a hawk and some crows saw two men in a very lonesome place among the sand hills. They alone saw. And the two met, riding. One was a Ponca gone forth to seek the unappearing herd. He was tall and well made, and his pony was spotted. The other was also even as the first, although not a Ponca; but his pony was not spotted.

And when they met a great cry went up from the one whose pony was not spotted. The coyote and the hawk and the crows heard and saw. It seemed a strange cry in the silence that lived there. Then he who rode the spotted pony turned and fled; but an arrow is swifter than a pony, though it be wind-footed; and he who fled fell upon the sand and the pony ran at some distance and stopped. He looked on also.

And the two men met. He with the arrow in his back arose with a groan from the sand and growled as the other approached and dismounted. They seemed as two who had met and parted enemies.

They seized each other and rolled upon the sand. The coyote whined, the crows cawed, but the hawk only watched. But all the while the ponies neighed.

And the sting of the arrow weakened one, but he fought like a bear. He made a good fight. But the other fixed his hands upon his enemy's throat until the silent places were filled with a gurgling and a rasping of breath that came hard. Then there was only

silence. The coyote ran away, the crows and the hawk flew. The ponies alone watched now.

And the man whose pony was not spotted arose and laughed very loud—only it was not the laugh of a glad man. Then the man who laughed stripped off the garments of the other and put them upon himself. Then he built a fire and lit his pipe and made *choobay* smoke. Then he spoke to the various *wakundas* that were somewhere there in the silence.

“I have killed my enemy. I will burn his heart and give you the ashes, O Grandfathers!”

The crows heard this, for they had come back looking for their feast.

And the man burned the heart of his enemy and scattered the ashes, singing a brave song all the while. He had learned to do this from the Kansas; it is their custom.

Then the man got on the spotted pony and rode away, bearing with him the weapons of the man who stayed. And when he was gone the crows and the coyote came and made harsh noises at each other, for each was hungry, and there was a feast spread there upon the sand.

And it happened that evening, they say, that one rode into the Ponca camp and went to the tepee where Sun Eyes, the Omaha woman, waited for someone.

The man who came had his whole face hidden with a piece of buckskin, having eye and mouth holes

in it. And Sun Eyes was cooking over a fire before her tepee.

"Ho, Mad Buffalo!" she said; "you have not found the bison. Why have you hidden your face?"

"I found no bison," said the man, "but I saw something in the hills which caused me to hide my face."

And Sun Eyes looked keenly at the man, for she thought it was some *wakunda* he had seen.

"Why do you speak in a strange voice?" said she; and she trembled as she said it.

"He who has seen something is never the same again!" said he.

And while the woman wondered the two ate together. And as the man ate he laughed very pleasantly at times like a man who is very glad.

"Why do you laugh, Mad Buffalo?" said the woman.

"Because I was very hungry for something, and I have it now," said the man.

And when he had ceased eating he sang glad songs, and again the woman questioned.

"I sing because of what I saw in the hills," said he.

And this seemed very strange to the woman. But it is not allowed that one should question a man who has seen a *wakunda*.

And it happened that the man was pleased to speak evil words of Rain Walker, and Sun Eyes hung her head; her eyes were wet.

Then said the man, having seen: "Why do you act so? Do you want him? Behold! Am I not as good to see as Rain Walker?"

And he acted as one who is almost angry and a little sad. But the woman only sobbed a very little sob, for as the chief said in the council, a very wise man does not know the ways of a woman.

And it happened that night, they say, that, as the two slept, Sun Eyes dreamed a strange dream that made her cry out. And the two sat up startled.

"What is it?" said the man.

"A dream!" sobbed Sun Eyes.

"What dream?" said the man, and his voice seemed kind.

"I cannot tell; I do not wish to be beaten."

"Tell it, Sun Eyes. Was it about—Rain Walker?"

She did not answer; the man sighed.

"Do not be afraid," he said. And she spoke.

"I dreamed that I saw my *zhinga zhinga* that I am carrying. And it was Rain Walker's. It had his face, and it looked upon me with hate. It pushed me away when I offered my breast. It would take no milk from me. And it seemed that its look pierced me like a barbed arrow. Thus I awoke, and cried out."

The woman was sobbing, and a tremor ran through the man. She felt it as he leaned against her, and she thought it anger.

"Take me there where I came from—to the vil-

lage of my people!" she cried. "You are big and good to see, and many women will follow you! Take me to my people! Dreams are wiser than men; the *wakundas* send them. I wish to go back, that my child may smile and take my breast."

And the man rose and began dressing for the trail.

"I will take you back," said he. "Dreams are wiser than men."

And before the day walked the two went forth on the long trail, back to the village of the woman's people.

The man went before and the woman followed, bearing the burdens of the trail. But when the dawn came the man did a strange thing. He took the burdens upon his own shoulders, saying nothing. It seemed his heart had been softened; but his face being hidden, the woman could not see what was written there.

And the trail was long; but the man was kind. He seemed no longer the Mad Buffalo. He made fires and pitched the tepee like a squaw. He spoke soft words.

And after many days of travelling the two came, as the Night was beginning to walk, to the brown brow of the hill beneath which lay the village of the Omahas.

And the man said: "There are your people. Go!"

And the woman moaned, saying: "He will not take me, and the dream will be true. Never on the

long trail did my heart fail; but now I am weak.
My breast aches."

But the man said: "Sun Eyes, had not Rain Walker ever a soft heart? He will take you back. Look!"

And the woman, who had been gazing through tears upon the village of her people, turned and saw that the man had torn the buckskin from his face. She gave a cry and shrank from what she saw.

But the man took her gently by the hand.

"He will take you back," he said; "dreams are wiser than men!"

XV

THE SMILE OF GOD

THE Omahas were hunting bison. The young moon had been thin and bent like a bow by the arm of a strong man when they had left their village in the valley of Ne Shuga. Night after night it had grown above their cheerless tepees, ever further eastward, until now it came forth no more, but lingered in its black lodge like a brave who has walked far and keeps his blankets because the way was hard and long.

All through the time of the growing and dying moon, the Omahas had sought for the bison. Upon a hundred summits they had halted to gaze beneath the arched hand into the lonely valleys from whence came no sound of lowing cows or bellowing bulls. Like the voice of Famine through the lonesome air came the *caw-caw* of the crow. Like heaps of bleaching bones the far-off sage brush whitened.

This evening as the women busied themselves with the building of the tepees, there was no crooning on their lips. The valley in which they were placing their camp was still but for the clattering of the poles, as they were placed in their conical positions, or the flap of the blankets, which were being bound about the poles for a covering.

At dreary intervals a grazing pony would toss its weary head and neigh nervously, as if wondering at the stillness of its masters.

The silent squaws gathered armfuls of scrub oak and plum twigs, and lit fires that lapped the blackening air with ruddy tongues and sent their voices roaring up the hills, to be answered by their echoes that came back faintly like the lowing of a phantom herd!

The old men and the braves sat about the fires and no word was on their lips. From lip to lip the fragrant pipe passed, yet even its softening influence could not move to speech the lips it touched. Each face upon which the firelight fell was hideous with the gauntness of hunger.

One by one the runners, sent out in search of the herds, came into camp. With a slow, swinging trot these great lean men approached, as the gaunt wolf approaches his lair in the cold light of the morning when no prey has been abroad all night. Sullen and silent they took their places in the cheerless circles about the fires. There was no need for words from them. Their expectant kinsmen looked into their faces and read the tale of their despair so readily from the drawn skin and sunken eyes that they groaned.

The glow of the west fell into the greyness of ashes, as a camp fire falls when all the women sleep. Then the dark came over the eastern hills. Far into the night the braves and old men sat about the fires,

speechless. As they listened, they could hear the hungry children whining in their sleep. Once a squaw, suddenly awakened from a dream near the fires, leaped to her feet and cried "*Tae! Tae!* [bison]" The hoarse cry beat against the black hills and came back like a mockery. The men gazed at each other and grinned with twitching lips.

Again the lonesome air slumbered, save for a weird song that arose from the tepee of the big medicine-man, Ashunhunga. He was calling to Wakunda. The song droned itself into silence like the song of a locust when the evening is quiet.

After some time, a sound of wailing came from the mysterious tepee; and as the men turned their faces to the place, they beheld the half-naked form of the medicine-man passing like a spectre amid the glow of the fires.

The dry skin clung to his ribs and sinews. His head was thrown back and the fires lit his face. Through his parted lips the white teeth shone. Out of the hollows of his eyes a wild light glared. The dream was upon him! With bony hands clenched, he beat his naked breast and cried: "*Wah-hoo-ha-a!* *Wah-hoo-ha-a-a-a-a!*" The curse of Wakunda is upon us! The black spirits of the dead are about us! For Ashunhunga had a dream. A black spirit came to him and its eyes were lightning and its voice was thunder as it said: 'Why do you shelter him whom Wakunda hates?' *Wa-hoo-ha-a-a-a-a-a!*"

Blood fell from the mysterious man's palms where

the nails clenched convulsively, and his arms and breast were smeared with blood. The listeners shuddered as the wild voice began anew.

“Ashunhunga will talk to the black spirit! He will learn whom Wakunda hates! Him we shall cast from us! Then Wakunda will smile and the valleys shall thunder with herds!”

Beating his breast and gesticulating wildly with his long, bony arms, the old man passed back amid the tepees.

Those who sat about the fires were frozen by the wild words into bronze statues of Fear. Scarcely was a breath drawn; not a man moved. The black spirits of the dead were about them! Not a hand was raised to replenish the fires with faggots. The flames sank, and the embers sent a dull blue light upon the circles of haggard faces!

As Ashunhunga passed on toward his tepee, he suddenly stumbled over a shivering form, huddled in the shadow. Quickly regaining his feet, he saw that upon which he had stumbled. It was a dwarfed, ill-shapen body, with short, crooked legs and long emaciated arms with protruding joints. The form raised itself upon its hands and knees and looked upon the medicine-man with an idiot leer upon its face.

It was Shanugahi (Nettle) the cripple.

With a cry as of a squaw who sees a black spirit in her sleep, Ashunhunga rushed into his tepee. His mystical songs wailed over the camp for a while,

then ceased. Overcome by his fanatical emotions, he had fallen into a swoon. And he had a dream.

He was alone upon the prairie and hunger was pinching his entrails. Then there came a bison bull toward him, roaring through the silence. He raised his bow, and with sure aim, sent an arrow singing into the heart of the beast. Then the air grew black, save for a blue light as of dying fires. The bison began to change form! Its hind legs grew short and crooked; its fore legs became long and lean and sinewy like the arms of a starving man. Its body dwindled, dwindled—and it was human! Its head became indistinct and wavered as in a haze. Then it grew boldly up in the ghastly light and the face was the face of Shanugahi with the idiot leer!

The vision whirled giddily and sank into the dizzy darkness.

With a cry as of one stabbed in his sleep, Ashunhunga sprang from his blanket and rushed out of his tepee. Those who sat about the smouldering fires, startled from their dumb terror by the cry, raised their eyes and gazed upon the face of the medicine-man as he passed. They did not speak, but the question on their faces was "who?"

"It is Shanugahi!" said Ashunhunga in an awing whisper. "It is Shanugahi whom Wakunda hates! He has brought the curse upon us!"

The ill-shapen bronze mass of flesh that was Shanugahi lay curled up in sleep in the shadow of a tepee. Suddenly his sleep was broken by a heavy

hand reaching out of the darkness. He shook himself, raised his head and gazed about. He saw the faces of a number of braves indistinct in the dim glow of the fires. Nearby a pony stood ready for a rider. Then a strange voice close to his ear, whispered hoarsely: "Fly! Fly! The black spirits of the dead are about you! The curse of Wakunda is upon you! Fly! Fly!"

Shanugahi stared about him, then turned his meaningless eyes upon his tribesmen and leered. Strong arms seized him and placed him astride the waiting pony. Someone lashed the animal across the haunches, and it plunged down the valley into the blackness of the night.

When the dazed rider had gone some distance, the meaning of the whispered words came upon him. Cold sweat sprang out on his limbs. He glanced about him, and the night was swarming with demons!

His shriek cut the stillness like a knife of ice! He grasped the mane of the pony with a convulsive clasp. He dashed his heels into the flanks of the terrified brute! The lone gulches thundered with the beat of hoofs. Bushes flew past, and each was a pursuing black spirit!

Shanugahi clung closely to the pony's back, hiding his face in its tossing mane, clasping its neck with the strength of madness, pressing its ribs with his knees until the straining animal groaned with pain and fright. Through valleys, over hills, down

gulches they fled! Clumps of sage brush flitted past, and each was a heap of whitened bones!

It was like falling in a nightmare through an immeasurable black pit, save for the scamper of the coyote as it sought the gulches, whining, or the tumbling flight of the owl or bat, fleeing with wings that whirred in the stillness!

The pace of the pony became slower and slower. Its breath came in short, rasping gasps. Then with a last effort of its terrified limbs, it took the long incline of a high hill, and upon the bare summit tumbled to its knees. Shanugahi rolled off its back, and horse and rider, worn out, swooned upon the summit.

When Shanugahi awoke, the pale light that foregoes the coming sun lay upon the shivering hills. He looked about him and saw a circle of grey wolves staring at him with eyes like small moons dawn-stricken. He felt about him for a weapon, but found only his stone pipe and a pouch of red willow bark.

He filled his pipe and striking a spark from a bit of flint that strewed the summit, he lit it. Then the sun peeped over the far sky line and with its horizontal rays touched the hills with fire. Its light warmed the frozen nerves of Shanugahi. He puffed grey rings of smoke into the air.

At length, taking his pipe from his mouth, he reared his hideous body in the glow of the morning, and with a long, bony arm, raised his pipe to the smiling sun in silent invocation. For some time,

motionless, he stood like a being of the black depths praying for mercy from the shining heights. Then he uttered two words.

“Wakunda! Tae!” (O God! Bison!)

The staring wolves, moved by the wild voice, raised their noses to the heavens with a howl, and slunk away into the gulches. The sun rose higher and higher, and Shanugahi breathed into his veins the laughing gold of the morning. With all the simplicity of his nature, he forgot the terror of the night. It was to him as some vague dream, dreamed many summers past. Yet the one fixed idea of finding the bison swayed his whole being.

His hunger had reached that stage in which it acts like a heavy draught of some subtle intoxicant. The stupor of days past had been changed into a joyous and even hopeful delirium. And as he looked upon the sun, to him it was the smile of Wakunda! Now he would find the bison.

He caught his pony, grazing near by, and leaping upon its back, urged its stiffened limbs into a jog and took the lonesome stretch of prairie with song upon his lips. All day the pony jogged across the prairie at an easy pace toward the west. At that time of the evening when the coolness comes with the dew, and the bugs awake with drowsy hummings among the grasses, Shanugahi caught a roaring sound as of some sullen storm that thunders beneath the horizon.

He checked his pony and placing his hands to his ears, listened intently. He knew the sound! Dis-

mounting, he crawled to the top of a hill and gazed into a broad valley.

As far as he could see, straining his eyes, the valley was black with bison! For a moment he stood spell-bound; then a great joy lashed his blood into a frenzy. He rushed to his pony and mounting, turned its head to the east. The night came down, and still Shanugahi held his pony to a fast gallop. His brain whirled giddily. Now he had found the bison! His people would not starve. He sang and shouted and laughed until his voice broke into a cackle! The delirium of the rider was caught by the pony. With all the might of long generations of prairie herds, it sent the thundering hills and valleys under its feet.

At that time of the morning when the east grows pale, and sleep is the deepest, the famished tribe, having moved a weary day's journey westward, was sleeping heavily. Suddenly a hoarse shout shattered their dreams and made the hills clamorous with echoes!

The whole camp leaped from its blankets and stared with blinking eyes in the direction of the shout.

There, upon the brow of a hill that overlooked the camp, stood a horse and rider set in bold relief against the pale sky of morning. With a long, bony arm the rider pointed to the westward and again he cried in a weak, broken voice:

“*Tae! Tae!*” (Bison! bison!)

Then horse and rider collapsed like the figures of a dream that wavers with the morning. A number of men rushing up the hill, found the bodies of the pony and Shanugahi. Upon the lips of the dead rider lingered a calm smile as of contentment.

"It is the smile of Wakunda," said one old man in awe.

"Wakunda smiles! Wakunda smiles!" shouted the men. The whole camp caught up the cry. "Bison! Bison! Wakunda smiles!"

And when the sun arose, they were moving westward on the trail of Shanugahi.

Two nights afterward there was joy in the camp of the Omahas. Having found the long-sought-for herd, they had feasted heavily, and now they slept as the wolf sleeps when the prey has not escaped. Beside a fire two old men were still awake, and as they smoked, they talked of Shanugahi. He had found the herd. Wakunda had smiled upon him; and yet Shanugahi was ugly and a cripple!

"Ugh!" they both grunted after a thoughtful silence, shaking their heads in wonderment at so incomprehensible a thing.

Then they wrapped themselves in their blankets, and slept.

XVI

THE HEART OF A WOMAN

THE council of the fathers sat in the Big Lodge with very grave faces, for they had come together to pass judgment upon the deed of a woman. As they passed the pipe about the circle, there were no words; for in the silence the good spirits may speak, and well they knew that it is a big thing to sit in judgment.

And after a time of silence and deep thought, the door-flap of the lodge was pushed aside by two who came—an old man bent with many loads, and a woman in whose eyes the spring still lived. And when the two had sat down without the circle, the head chief spoke: "Let the man speak first." Then the old man, who had brought the woman, arose.

"Fathers, you see a man with a sad heart, for I have brought my daughter before you for judgment. The things which she has told me I could have buried very deep in my breast; but I am old, and the wisdom of the old is mine. Who can bury a bad thing deeper than the spirits see?"

"And so I am here to make sharp words against myself, for the father and the child are one."

"You remember that the season of singing frogs

[April] has passed three times since one of the palefaces came among us. He was a paleface, but he was not like his brothers who find gladness in doing deeds that are bad. You have not forgotten how his words and deeds were kind, his voice very good to hear, nor how his face had the beauty of a woman's, though it was not a woman's face. Also his hands were white as the first snow fallen on a green place; and his hair was long like the hair of our people, but it clung about his head like a brown cloud when the evening is old.

"He was hungry and lean when he came among us. His pony was hungry and lean. And we took him in with glad hearts; we lit the feast fires for him; his pony we staked in our greenest places: for he was not like his brothers.

"And we called him 'the man with the singing box,' for he brought with him a thing of wood and sinews; and over this, while we feasted, he drew a stick of wood with the hair of a pony's tail fastened to it, making songs sweeter than those of our best women singers, and deeper than the voices of men who are glad.

"Much we wondered at this, for the magic of the paleface is a great magic. And as he made the wood and sinews sing together, we forgot to eat and the feast fires fell blue; for never before had such a singing been heard in our lands. And once he made it sing a battle song that snarled like a wounded rattlesnake in a dry place, and cried like an angry

warrior, and shrieked like arrows, and thundered like many pony hoofs, and wailed like the women when the band comes back with dead braves across the backs of ponies. And as he made it sing this song, even we who were wise leaped to our feet and drew forth our weapons and shouted the war cry of our people—so great was the song. And when our shouting ceased, the man made the medicine box sing low and sweet and thin like a woman crying over a sick *zhinga zhinga* [baby] in the night. And we forgot the battle cries; we gave tears like old women.

“Do you remember? This is the man of whom I speak.

“Many young moons grew old and passed away, and still he lived among us, until, lo! he was even as our kinsman, for he learned the tongue of our people, being great of wit.

“And he told us of a wanderer whose own people were unkind to him; a tale of one who was not of the people of whom he was born, because he loved the spirits that sing, more than a very rich man loves his herds of ponies blackening many hills where they graze. And it was of himself he told; he was the wanderer. So we loved him because of this and because of his kind words and because of the song which he made in his medicine box.

“And all the while my girl here was growing taller—very good to see. Many times I said to my woman, ‘There is something growing between these

two.' And we both saw it with glad hearts, for he was a great man.

"And one night in my first sleep I was awakened by a crying of sorrows better to hear than laughter—a moan that grew loud and fell again into softness like a night wind wailing in a lonesome place where thickets grow. And my woman beside me whispered, 'It is the spirits singing.' But the girl here only breathed very hard. I could hear her breathing in the darkness.

"And I got up; I pushed the skin flap aside; I stood as though I were in a dream. For there by the tepee stood the man with the singing box at his neck. His long, white fingers worked upon the sinews; his arm drew the hair-stick up and down. His face looked to the sky and the white fires of the night were upon it. Never had I seen such a face; for it was not a man's face nor yet a woman's. It was the face of a good man's spirit come back from the star-paths. I looked at his lips, for it seemed that the singing grew up from his mouth; but his lips were very still.

"And my eyes made tears; for many forgotten sorrows came back to me at once, and I felt a great kindness for all things, which I could not understand.

"And when he dropped his arm and looked at me, his eyes threw soft, white fire into my breast, and then I knew the singing was not for me. Once when my woman was young and still in the lodge of her father, I looked upon her with such a look.

“So I gave the girl to the paleface; and for a time the singing box was still; for they made a silent music between them. And before the first frosts made the hills shiver, the palefaces who trade for furs came to our village, and the man went with them; and with him went the woman. No man can be deaf to the call of his kind; so he went. And now the woman shall speak, and you shall judge her deed.”

The old man sat down and rested his face in his hands. The young woman arose to her feet. With lips parted the chiefs bent forward to catch the words which should fall from her mouth. Tall and thin she was, and shapely. But the shadows of a great toil and a great sorrow clung about her lean cheeks and under her black eyes, grown too big with much weeping.

“Fathers,” she began, “I will tell you how my bad deed grew upon me; and you shall judge. I will take the punishment, for I have felt much aching of the breast and I can stand yet a little more.

“Three summers ago I followed the man of the singing box into the North. This you know—but the rest you do not know. It is the way of the paleface to toil for the white metal. They showed my man the white metal, and it led him into the North among strange peoples, where there is much gathering of furs. And I went with him, for a woman is weak and must follow the man.

“Far into the North we went where the Smoky

Water runs thin so that a very little man can throw a stone across it. And the singing box went with us.

“And we built a lodge of logs, after the manner of his people, near to a great log lodge where the big pale chief lived and said words that should be obeyed. And for a time our hearts sang together. But when the snows had come, it happened that the big pale chief spoke a word, and my man went with his brothers, driving many dogs further into the North where there are furs of much worth.

“And when my man left he said, ‘Take good care of Vylin while I am gone, for she is dearer to me than my life.’ And I stared at him because I did not understand. It was the singing box of which he spoke; as though it were a person he spoke of it; he called it Vylin; and much I wondered.

“But because my heart was warm toward the man, I did acts of kindness to the singing box, which he called Vylin; for I had not yet learned that it was no box of wood, but the spirit of a dead woman of the palefaces.

“Through the long cold nights I held it close to me under the blankets. And often in the night I was awakened by its crying when in my sleep I touched it strongly. Like a *zhinga zhinga* [baby] it cried; and my heart was softened toward it, for I had no child then. Through the days I talked to Vylin. I washed it much that it might be clean and of a good smell. And often it made soft sounds

like a *zhinga zhinga* that is glad. Then would I hold it to my dry breasts and sing to it.

“But more and more I learned that it was no box of wood, but a living thing. For I began to see that it had the shape of a woman. Its neck was very slender; its head was small; and its hair fell in four little braids across its neck and breast down to its hips. And the more I learned, the more my breast ached; for he loved Vylin, and her voice was sweeter for singing than my voice. And I thought much of how she sang for him alone. And I said, ‘She does not sing for me—only for him does she sing; therefore she loves him well.’

“When the grass came again and the ice broke up, my man came back with the furs and the dogs and the men. They came floating down the river on big canoes. And I sang when he came again into his lodge, for the winter had been long. Also, I showed him how kind I had been to Vylin; I thought he would be very glad. But he frowned and spoke sharp words. He said it was wrong to wash Vylin. My breast ached; I could not understand. Does not a good mother wash her *zhinga zhinga*, that it may be clean and of a good smell? I had no *zhinga zhinga* then, and so I had been a mother to Vylin.

“And when I told him this, he laughed a very harsh laugh, and said it was Vylin, not a *zhinga zhinga*; so that I was sad until he spoke a very soft word, then I forgot for many days.

“But as the grass grew taller and the scent of

green things blew in every wind, my man grew strange toward me. Like a man with the ache for home he was. And more and more it became his mood to be very silent while he made Vylin sing to him—O such strange, soft songs, like spirits weeping!

“And more and more my heart grew sore toward Vylin, for when I sang that he might forget her to look upon me, he frowned and spoke sharp words.

“So one day as he sat in a shady place, making songs with his fingers, I said to him: ‘If so softly you should lay your fingers upon *my* neck, I too could sing as sweetly!’ And he smiled, and it was like the sun breaking through a cloud that has hung long over the day. And he drew me close to him and said: ‘Do you see the leaves upon this tree, and do you know how many?’ And I laughed, for I was glad, and in the old days it had often been his wish to joke so. But he said: ‘So many of the palefaces have listened to me making Vylin sing; and they wept to hear. But now am I far away and strange peoples are about me.’

“And that was the last of my gladness for many moons; for more and more he wished to be silent. And when the snows came again he went away. And I was very lonesome and sad until I knew that I would be a mother. Then my heart sang, for I said: ‘Now, my man will look upon me again and speak soft words as in the old times. Does Vylin bring him *zhinga zhingas*? ’

“And all through the cold days I was glad; my

heart was soft. I took good care of Vylin; I was kind to her, for at last I thought that she would be second in his heart. I pitied her as I thought this. I washed her no more, but ever through the frosty nights I kept her warm with many blankets, even though I shivered.

“And when the grass came my man came also. And another came, a *nu zhinga* [boy]. But my man looked with cold eyes upon my *zhinga zhinga*; so I wept many nights, many, many nights. And much weeping made me not good to see. So the man looked upon me no more; only upon Vylin did he look. With very soft eyes did he look upon her; with such eyes did he look upon me in the old days.

“My heart grew very bitter. Often I heard him talking soft talk to her—such as he talked to me in the old times. And I wished to tear her hair, her yellow hair from her head! I wished to kill her, to walk upon her, to hear her groan, to see her die!”

The woman’s eyes flashed a battle light. Her hands were clenched, her face was sharp and cruel. Very tall she grew in her anger—a mother of fighting men.

“And that night,” she said, “I threw angry words at the man. I spoke bad things of Vylin. I called great curses down upon her. And I said: ‘She sings, but does she bring you sons to feed you when you are old?’ And he laughed with a harsh sound.

“So that night when the man slept I got up very

stealthily from the blankets. My breast ached, and many black spirits pressed their fingers into my heart. I took a knife—a very sharp knife. I uncovered Vylin where she lay sleeping in her blankets. I felt for the place where her heart should be. Then I struck, struck, struck! Very deep I sent the sharp knife, and I laughed to hear the great groan that Vylin made as she died.

“ And also the man heard. He leaped from his blankets. He struck me with his fist; he beat me. He called down all the big curses of his people upon me. He gave me the *nu zhinga*. He pushed me from the door into the darkness.

“ ‘ Begone! ’ he said, ‘ for you have killed Vylin! ’

“ And I went into the darkness with my *nu zhinga*. Many days have I walked with much hunger; and always the *nu zhinga* was a heavy burden. And now I am thin; my feet are weary; my breast aches.”

A deep sighing shook the young woman as she sat down. The old man arose, and there was a sound of heavy breathing as he spoke to the chiefs who sat to judge: “ My girl has spoken of her bad deed. She has killed the singing spirit that the pale-face loved. How shall she be punished? ”

And after a long stillness the head chief spoke: “ The heart of a woman is a strange thing, a tender thing; who shall judge it? ”

And one by one they who sat to judge arose and left the big lodge.

XVII

MIGNON

BUT, Yellow Fox," I protested, "no one understands them; they do not understand themselves!"

Yellow Fox grunted and smiled, showing a very white set of wolfish teeth. We two were sitting together outside the lodge, and, male-like, we had hit upon the topic of woman. The locust-like cadences of the songs and the shuffle of dancing feet came muffled to us. The scent of boiling beef and the good smoke-tang of wood fires permeated the sultry night air, lifting my not overcivilised fancy back into the spacious star-hung feast rooms of the dead years, where big-boned, brawny, fighting men indulged their lusts for steaming haunches. The full moon lifted a Rabelaisian face of lusty red above the hills, and I saw by its light the eager spirit of the story-teller bright in the eyes of Yellow Fox.

"What they understand I do not know," he began; "I only know I do not understand. And I have travelled far. When I was a young man, many strange valleys knew my feet, and from many hill-tops my eyes looked forth. For from my first moccasins my feet caught the itch for going. And in many villages of strange peoples I have lived for

little spaces, until the feasts were tasteless and the maidens ugly. Then did my moccasins itch my feet again, so that I went forth and sought new feasts, other maidens.

“And I have known many maidens. None of them did I understand; and least of all—Mignon.

“Even to-night something of the soft summer smell of her is in my nose; and if I were not old I would walk far, walk far; for that smell is like a voice calling over big waters and many valleys—a voice so far away that the ear does not catch it—so thin that it is no sound, but a feeling.

“Have I told you how that a white man came to our lands once and led me on a long, strange trail? It happened so. He was a keeper of many strange men and many horses and many strange animals, and for money he showed these to many peoples, and so grew rich.

“And the man showed me much money; he told me of new lands and new peoples; he spoke of feasts, of women that were as dreams. Therefore, I felt the itch in my feet again, and I went with the man. And we came at last to many big tepees, where the man kept the strange things that he showed to the people for money. One of his tepees was as big as the village of a tribe—and he had many.

“I had my place among all these strange things; for the white man said: ‘You are the wild man that growls like a bear and eats babies. I give you money and you must look very wild and growl much when

the boys stick at you with straws.' And this was good fun.

"So I stood twice every day fastened to a post by a thong of metal. The people stood about me and stared. I growled, I pulled at the fastenings, I ate raw meat; I was very wild. Many came to see, and when I would have gone back to the lands of my people, the white man showed me more money, so that I stayed.

"We travelled very far with the big tepees. We came to the Big Salty Water, but we did not stop there; we crossed it—and were in another land.

"And then there was a big village—a very big village. There we stopped, and the people came to see.

"You know that vill'ge—Par's—Par's?" asked Yellow Fox, falling momentarily into English.

"Yes, Paris," I corrected, "and you were with Barnum."

"Ah," he assented, speaking his own tongue again; "and it is a village of women that make the eyes glad and the blood quick! I stood many days, growling for the people and eating raw meat. And one day Mignon came. A young man of her own people was with her. They stared and talked much together. Some of their talk I knew, for it was the talk that the fur traders used, and my father's father was a trader for furs.

"And Mignon made the eyes glad. She was tall for a woman and not thick. The women of my

people are short and thick. Her face was very white, and her eyes were big and deep—like waters in a shadow.

“And the man made jokes at me that stung like elkhorn whips, for he was thin and looked as one whose blood is half water. I could have choked him with two fingers like a worm. So!”

Yellow Fox snapped his fingers viciously.

“And it pleased the young man to shove his finger into my ribs and laugh. So I grasped his arm very hard. I put his finger to my mouth; I bit it and the blood came. He cried *ow ow*; then I said to the woman, using what speech of hers I knew: ‘Take this baby man of yours away or I will eat him, for I am hungry. But you are good to see; I like you; touch me.’

“And she, wondering that I spoke her speech, touched me!

“Ah—everything was changed!”

Yellow Fox suddenly passed into a subconscious mood. The moon, grown pale with its ascent, illumined his masterful male features, over which I could see the dream of old days flitting like a ghost. The song of the women dancing about the feast fires within arose into a high and tenuous minor of yearning, filling up the momentary gap in the story like a chorus. In the wake of the passing gust of song, the voice of Yellow Fox arose, soft, low, musical—the voice of memory.

“Her hands she laid upon me—soft and white

and thin, they were. She passed them over the muscles of my breast; she stroked my arms. Soft as a mother's touch was hers; like a mother's touch—but I felt a fire burning at her finger tips, that made me wish to fight big men for her, and make them bleed and make them groan and make them die, slobbering blood in the dust! Then afterward to take her far away, thrown across my back like a dead fawn; to build a lodge for her in a lonesome place where man's face never was!

“ Much hair she had—much hair that hung above her face like a dark cloud upon a white sky at evening. And it brushed across my breast! I shivered as in a wind that drives the snow before it—and yet I was not cold.

“ And then she was gone—swallowed up in the river of people. But not all of her was gone. A smell sweeter than the earth-smell when the spring rains fall was in my nostrils! A smell that gnawed within me like a hunger—yet I did not wish to eat! A smell of soft, white flesh—oh, very soft and white! And now in my old age I call that smell Mignon.

“ And the people, like a noisy, muddy stream, flowed round me, past me. But I growled no more; for I did not wish for fun. I hated them—they stank! An ache like the ache for home was upon me; an ache like the ache of a man who smells the home-smoke in a dream and wakes far off from home.

“ Two sunlights passed—and in the evening I stood under many lights, bound with the iron thongs;

and the noisy, stinking stream of people was about me. Their staring eyes were as many bugs that swarmed about and stung me. I strained at the iron thongs; I hurled the black curses of my people in among them—and they were pleased. But this was no play; I wished to rush among them and walk upon them; for I had seen, and now no longer did I see.

“But suddenly the smell came back! It grew up like the smell of spring when the ice makes thunder in the rivers and the flowers come out! And she was there beside me.

“I forgot the people; I was no longer angry. I was in a big lonesome prairie with the sunlight and the singing winds, and she was with me, and all the air seemed soft and cool as when a black-winged raincloud shuts out a day of heat.

“I can feel her hands upon me yet.”

Yellow Fox sighed. A passionate outburst of song from the dancers within filled the quiet night with sounds of longing, through which the cowhide drums throbbed feverishly, like a heart.

“And the words she spoke were soft. They made me wish to shout the mating songs of my people. They made me very strong. And then I learned her name—Mignon.

“Mignon! Mignon! Such a sound the spring winds make among the first leaves; and yet—it is not all a sound; it is part a smell!

“ And after that she came often; every evening she came, like a south wind blowing over prairies sweet with rain at sunset. Many things she asked me and I told her many things. I made with my mouth a picture of my own lands; and some of it she put in a little book, and some she only drank with all her face, as though she was thirsty.

“ And they who had travelled far with us, the pitchers of the tepees and the tenders of the animals, laughed softly in passing, showing their teeth in mirth—for were they not jealous?

“ One night she did not come. And it happened on that night that the big tepees were folded up for another trail; and in the morning we were far away. My breast cried out for her; my nose longed for the smell which was Mignon.

“ So I spoke of her to the pitchers of the tepees, and they laughed very loud and long, sending forth breaths that stank as they laughed. They said bad things of Mignon. They said, ‘ Can you not understand? She is of those that her people have cast out.’ And this made my breast cry out for her again; for was I not also alone? Were not my own people far away? But the rest of it I knew to be another white man’s lie! One liar I struck very hard in the teeth; and when he got up from the dust, slobbering blood and toddling like a baby, he laughed no more and said no more bad things of Mignon. And was this not proof that he had lied?

“ Is the first earth-smell of the spring bad? Had

not many maidens of the prairies longed for me; and were they not good? Was I not big and of heavy muscles? Was I not young and good for the eyes of women?

“Since I am old and much withered, I can say this; for I have become another man.”

The song of the women-singers within had ceased, but the sullen drums kept up a throbbing snarl. At length the voice of Yellow Fox continued in a low monotone:

“We stopped in many big villages; and my breast was sick. More and more I wished for the prairies. At night I heard the dry winds singing in the grasses. I spoke no more of Mignon, for I was afraid to hear again the laughter of the pitchers of the tepees. One more laugh would have made my eyes blind with blood, and I would have killed.

“I lost the wish to eat; I grew shadow-thin. So the owner of the tepees said: ‘This wild man is dying for a sight of his prairies; I will send him back.’

“I travelled far, and again I was in my own land. I saw the hills; I smelled the smoke of the fires of my people. But this no longer filled me. I had seen, and now no longer could I see.

“And the winter came. I sat alone much, and as I sat alone, I had big thoughts. I said: ‘This that I have seen was a dream thing. It is gone; and I cannot find the sleep trail that leads to it again.

Therefore, I will do as others. I will take a woman of my own people. I will eat again; for this dream has only made me thin.'

"So I made a young woman of my people glad. I took her into my lodge. But even through the time of driving snows, I smelled the smell of spring. Mignon! Mignon! I heard the rain winds singing in the first leaves! Mignon! Mignon! I heard the sighing of summer waters! Mignon! Mignon! It was half a sound and half a smell—dream sound, dream smell—so thin, so thin!"

"And the time came when the big swift arrows of the geese flew northward, spreading softness as of many camp fires in all the air; and the River wakened and shook itself, shouting with a hoarse voice into the south. The green things came, and there was a singing of frogs where the early rains made pools. The smell, which was Mignon, breathed up out of the earth; the sound, which was Mignon, lived in the trees and grasses.

"And then the time came when it is no longer the spring, and not yet quite the summer. One evening I sat before my lodge, smoking and thinking big thoughts. And the sun was low. A dust cloud grew far down the road that twisted like a yellow snake toward the village of the white men. It was a waggon coming. It grew bigger; a white man was driving it. It came near; there was a woman in it. I stared very hard; I rubbed my eyes, for what I saw was as though it had all grown up out of my pipe smoke.

“ The woman was tall and not thick. Much hair she had—much hair that hung above her face like a black cloud upon a white sky in the evening. And in all the air about, there grew a smell sweeter than the earth-smell when the spring rains fall. I sat very still; I did not wish to frighten the dream away. And the woman came toward me with much rustling of garments, like the speaking of green leaves in the wind or the thin, small drumming of raindrops.

“ Then, between the puffing of two smoke rings, the Spring had grown big—and was the Summer! It was Mignon! It was Mignon! ”

Yellow Fox lifted his face to the full moon, and his voice was raised to a poignant cry as he uttered the word that was half sound, half smell. Then for some time he brooded with his chin resting in his hands, while the women-singers within filled the heavy air with wailings. At length he sat up and leisurely filled his pipe. His face had become a wrinkled mask again. He smoked awhile, then passing the pipe to me, he continued, and his voice was thick as though he still breathed smoke:

“ After the snows have run away, the earth-smell rises and all things grow drunk with it. The he-wolf sniffs it; he forgets his last year’s mate; he takes another and forgets. The air and the earth and the water are full of new loves, and nothing is ashamed.

“ It was so.

“ When the next sunlight came I made ready for

the trail. I rolled up my tepee. All the while my woman stared upon the woman who had come, with eyes made sharp with hate. I called in my ponies from the grazing places. I hitched a pony to the drag. I put upon the drag the tepee and the food and the little box that Mignon had brought with her—a box of many garments—garments that made songs when she walked, like the songs of rain in the leaves. I lifted Mignon upon the drag-pony's back, and we rode away on the summer trail.

“I heard my woman wailing and crying out bitterly in my lodge, but a spirit led me on—the spirit that calls the green things out in the spring—the spirit that whispers into the ear of the sleeping River and makes it leap up and shout and tear the thongs that bind it—the spirit that makes the wolves cry out in the lonesome places that the mate may hear. That spirit went calling down the trail I followed.

“And we came to a place by the river where the hills were high and many leaves made coolness. There I pitched the tepee; and the days were as little flashes of light, and the nights were as little shadows passing.

“Never before had I found it so good to live. Mignon made songs that laughed and cried; and when she did not sing, the rustle of her garments was a song. I became as a squaw; I brought the wood and water; I made the fires; I cooked. I was bowed before her. Never before had I bowed before any-

one, for I was strong. I could not understand. She was so soft and white and of so sweet a smell!

“But the time came when she no longer sang. She grew silent, and each day gazed long upon the river. Her hands touched me no more with the touch of soft fires. So I grew kinder still. I spoke soft words. I made sweet sounds to call her. But she frowned and pushed me away.

“My breast ached much, so I said: ‘You think always of that baby man whose finger I bit. I could choke him with my fingers—so!’ But she laughed in my face, making sharp jokes to fling at me. I was stung as with whips when the whippers are angry. I said: ‘Go back to your baby man!’

“I did not wish her to go; they were the words of my anger. But she got up very straight and tall. There was lightning in her eyes. Thunder slept in her face. And her hair seemed as a black cloud that blows up angrily out of the hot south!

“She went to the tepee; she made ready to go; and all the while I watched with fires in my breast. Then suddenly she turned upon me—her face was a flame. She flung words at me: ‘You are all the same!’ She spit in my face! I have been struck in the teeth by strong men, but never have I felt so hard a blow. I sat as a man in a dream. I heard the angry song of her skirts as she fled up the back-trail. And then I was as one who wakens with a great hunger, and smells raw meat! I leaped up; I ran after her; I meant to kill her!

“ I caught her; I struck her with my fist, even as I struck the man who lied. I put my fingers at her throat and pressed very hard. I carried her back to the tepee. I thought I had killed her.

“ Oh, the smell of her flesh as she lay very still—as though I had stepped upon a flower!

“ And then after a long time, when my breast was growing sick, she opened her eyes and looked upon me. O tender, tender were her eyes and full of soft fires! It was the old look, only it was stronger. She raised herself to her knees; she put her arms around my neck; she put her lips on my lips; she called me soft names!

“ I thought this was some woman’s trick. I pushed her from me. I said: ‘ I am hungry; you are my squaw; cook my food! ’ And she brought wood and water; she made a fire; she worked for me. All the while her eyes were soft, and often she touched me with finger tips that burned as of old with soft fires. I could not understand. When I was kind, then was she not kind. And now, with the blue marks of my angry fingers at her throat, she worked for me, her eyes were soft for me, her finger-tips were warm for me. I cannot understand.”

Yellow Fox took the pipe from my hands and smoked long in silence. He sighed deeply, breathing in great breaths of smoke. At length, growing impatient, I ventured a question: “ And what became of Mignon? ”

He laid down his pipe and said in a low voice:

“The woman who wailed in the lodge had not forgotten!

“The plums ripened,” he continued, “and the flowers that bloomed upon our summer trail were heavy with seed. The hills grew brown. A greyness like smoke was in all the air. The grapes hung thick and purple.

“And it happened one night when the first small pinch of frost was in the air, that Mignon would sing soft baby songs, such as the mothers of her people sang, she said. Oh, such soft, low songs! I hear them yet. A kindness was in her face, like that in the face of a young mother. I saw it by the light of the wood fire that held the frost away. And when she had sung much, as to a child, she put her hands upon my shoulders and she said a strange thing. This is what she said, I remember: ‘Sometime, Yellow Fox, I will sing to your *zhinga zhinga* [baby]; will you be glad?’

“And I wondered much, for her eyes were wet when she said it.

“And that night she fell to sleep with her soft hands clutching my arm. And something made me wish to sing. I watched her sleeping, and there was an ache in my breast when I remembered the feel of my angry fingers at her throat. And then I slept.

“But in that time when the night is deepest and sleep is like a weight upon the eyes, a sharp cry woke me. I leaped up. The fire was almost dead. I heard feet flying through the dead leaves into the

darkness. One hand felt warm and wet; I raised it to my nose and it was blood. And then I heard a gasping for breath and a sound of gurgling. I put my hand upon the breast of Mignon—and it was wet with blood!

“I scraped the embers together and made a little flame. I looked upon her face and it had the look of death. Eyes that ached she turned upon me. I stopped the blood with torn garments. I called her soft names and she clutched my fingers. Then she was very quiet. I could hear leaves dropping out in the night.

“And when the face of the night turned grey, she opened her eyes that were hot and dry. With very weak hands she drew my ear close to her lips. She breathed a little broken piece of song—a baby song—a song of the mothers of her people. And when I looked upon her again, her face was pinched, her eyes stared.”

Yellow Fox lapsed into another prolonged silence. The dancers and singers in the lodge had ceased. A heavy, sultry silence filled the night. When he spoke again his voice came low and muffled:

“I buried her after the manner of my people. I sang the songs of the dead. Above her grave I killed the pony that she rode. And then I went away upon the trail that was no more the trail of summer. But the winds in the grasses sang her name. Mignon! Mignon! I heard the rain winds

singing in the first leaves. Mignon! Mignon! I heard the sighing of summer waters. Mignon! Mignon! I smelled the smell of spring. Everywhere it was—Mignon!—half sound, half smell—dream-sound, dream-smell—so thin—so thin.”

XVIII

A POLITICAL COUP AT LITTLE OMAHA

THE struggle for Congressional honours in the Third District of Nebraska was to be a hard one. The white voters of the District were about evenly divided between the two parties, and therefore the necessary elective majority was to be found among the Omaha Indians, whose reservation lies in this district.

So this remnant of the Dark Ages became of pivotal importance in Twentieth Century politics; and it was here, in the wildest land of the district, that the decisive battle of strategy must be fought.

For practical purposes, the intelligent white voter ceased to exist, and there was only a slothful, ignorant band of semi-savages who should choose by chance the national representative of educated thousands.

The typical reservation Indian is primarily a stomach, and secondarily nothing in particular. Let him fill his belly and he is easily handled. This axiom had been taken as a basis for action by the whiphands of the Democratic Party, who, accordingly, scattered broadcast throughout the reservation considerable quantities of the meat of superannuated

bulls; sat in the feasts with cross-legged condescension; smoked the reeking stone pipes; drank hot soup with the suppressed shudders of a revolting stomach, and called the brown men "brothers."

This had all worked very well in the latter days of September, and there had been considerable rejoicing in local Democratic circles over the bright prospects for a sweeping majority.

It was not until the first of October that the opposition suddenly hurled a thunderbolt out of the blue sky of its seemingly serene inactivity. The Agent, holding his appointment under a Republican administration, announced at a weekly land payment that \$100,000 of the considerable sum held in trust by the Government would be paid pro rata to the Omahas during the month. It was after this announcement that the local leaders of the Republican Party became active. They explained to their brothers how surpassingly good it was of them to bring about this payment. Would their brothers forget this at the November election? Of course not!

So it happened that the bull meat lost its power of persuasion and for several weeks there was not a brown Democrat on the reserve. Thus, at the opening of the big payment on a Monday morning two weeks before election, the Democratic candidate for Congress found himself staring Defeat in the face (which was brown) after having enjoyed several weeks of victory (which was premature).

The "big payment" has always been picturesque and is now fast becoming impossible. It may be defined as the spectacular bow of the Present to the Past, with which Civilisation lowers its proud plume and says to the Savage Age: "Sorry I swiped your land; take that and don't feel sore!" Or words to that effect.

The opening days of the big payment were warm with the lazy warmth of the mellow, golden hours of late October. The untilled hills of the reservation thrust themselves up into the autumn glare, unashamed of their poverty of soil. The Agency building nestled forlornly in a creek valley surrounded by the yellow, wrinkled hills.

In the early morning a lazy string of vehicles began to pour into the Agency from the dozen or more roads that outraged the compass with their crazy windings, and seamed the bronze face of the prairie with ugly scars. Carts, buggies, waggons, carriages, some of glaring newness, weighted down to the axles with squaws, papooses and the inevitable mortgage; others in an epileptic stage of decay, with the weary air of having borne the weight of outlawed paper for many moons; ponies, long-haired, and emaciated with many unconsoling feeds of post and halter, carrying at once upon their sawlike backs their sweating, heavy masters, and (heavier than these) the seeming consciousness of long-dishonoured promissory notes; these constituted the grotesque Republican procession that streamed into Little

Omaha, as the Agency is called, on that morning in October.

It was as a tribal exodus. The entire tribe of twelve hundred odd men, women, and children was leaving its shacks and tepees that morning, in search of the minted eagles of the Government, just as, of old, they moved in a hungry body upon the trail of the bison.

As the vanguard of this grand but dilapidated army of the primitive world closed in upon the Agency, it was met by the vanguard of the greater commercial army of civilisation, and a wordy skirmish ensued. These were the inevitable collectors who hang about an Indian payment like a crowd of crows scenting a carcass. One might have heard such a conversation as this above the tumult of the meeting races:

“Well, Big Bear, goin’ to pay that note to-day?”

“Ugh?”

“I say [voice raised a key], are you goin’ to pay that note—*muska zhinga, wabugazee* [money, note]?”

“*Unkazhee!*” (Don’t understand.)

“Damn your black hide, Big Bear, you can talk as good as I can! I say, [voice raised to a shriek] if you don’t pay that note, I’ll come over to your place and take every dodgasted, straw-bellied *shonga* [pony] you’ve got!”

“Gad up!”

And the delinquent debtor put the whip to his

long-haired, shambling mortgages and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

The Omaha is a genius for contracting debts. At the beginning of the big payment, the aggregate debts of the tribe were roughly estimated at \$200,000, the living representative of long-digested groceries, starved ponies, shattered vehicles and forgotten alcoholic debauches.

The Government, in the wisdom of blindness, had caused large placards to be posted at the entrances to the Agency grounds, bearing this order: "No collector of any description shall be allowed within a radius of half a mile from the pay station." Accordingly, the burly Indian police strutted about in blue clothes and brass buttons obstreperously hustling the white creditors over the half-mile line, where they lounged in disconsolate groups along the dusty highway, playing mumble-peg, pitching horseshoes, and verbally sending the entire tribe to the devil.

"Be cussed if I don't hate to see the Twentieth Century kicked downstairs this way by the Dark Ages! Cussed if I don't!" Thus a little wiry, pale-faced undertaker was heard to exclaim. His name was Comfort and he appeared to be a positive misery both to himself and to the delinquent relatives of the many good Indians he had laid away.

Beside the little undertaker, there were lawyers, bankers' clerks, grocerymen, liverymen, middlemen, butchers, doctors, and a half dozen politicians, there for the purpose of whipping the brown voters into

line. There were men like wolves, bears, dogs, goats, roosters, beetles, scorpions. The little undertaker was the scorpion; a middleman was like a bear; there was a banker's clerk like a goat; and a thin, angular, tall politician, with a body appropriately like an interrogation point, who slunk about like a hungry wolf.

By ten o'clock the last stragglers of the tribe had arrived and the Agency grounds were filled with circles of sweating, brown men, women, and children, passing the stone pipe, tranquilly awaiting the coming of the Agent, whose name, upon a reservation, is a shout.

By 10:30 the Agent appeared, riding down the dusty road from his residence. He was preceded by mounted police of pompous bearing, who shouted "The Agent! Make way for the Agent!" to the circles of their tribesmen who sat in the dust of the highway.

A short while afterward the loungers at the half-mile line heard the voice of a crier at the door of the pay station, calling the first name on the roll in the golden autumnal silence.

"*Nuzhee Mona! Geegoho!*" (Rain Walker! Come here!)

Then the fact that Mr. Rainwalker, a leader of the tribe much indebted to the white man, was about to be paid, became volatile as ammonia, and the fluttering of time-yellowed legal paper was heard along the waiting line of creditors.

"Owes me \$6.46 with interest for four years!"

"Me \$25 and interest—outlawed!"

"I've got the old cuss's note for fifty!"

"I buried his fourth and sixth wives," squeaked the little undertaker, "seven and nine years ago, respectively!"

Such exclamations ran down the line like a volley in different variations of vocal emphasis.

"Wonder how he's votin'," mused the hungry wolf of a politician.

"To the devil with politics!" roared the bear of a middleman; "I want the rent back I advanced him!"

At that moment Mr. Rainwalker was seen to leave the station, mount his pony, and proceed down the dusty road toward the half-mile line. It had doubtless occurred to him that during past winters it had been necessary to eat, and he was coming forth to make peace with the groceryman.

At sight of the approaching debtor, the lounging line of creditors sprang to its feet and stood at attention. The grocer, who spoke the Omaha tongue fluently and had a snug fortune laid away in consequence, walked rapidly in advance of the others and met Mr. Rainwalker at the line, followed by the straggling crowd of expectant creditors like a trailing cloud of hungry crows.

Mr. Rainwalker had a large, round, pockmarked face that looked for the world like a pumpkin pie overbaked by a careless cook, with a monstrous nose

in the centre of it. He sat placidly upon his pony, that had all the salient points of a starved cow, and dozed luxuriously at the shortest halt. The old chief seemed the visible body of an optimistic joke, sitting upon the bone heap of a tragedy!

The grocer had barely collected the greater share of the old man's check, when he became the centre of a noisy, gesticulating crowd of creditors. It was the chatter of the crows about the carrion.

"You know you promised me that you would settle that note!" said the goatlike bank clerk in his bleating voice.

"How about that rent money I advanced, Rain-walker?" roared the bearlike middleman.

"I want my money for them wives I buried for you—*two of 'em!*" squeaked the scorpionlike undertaker, holding up two explanatory fingers and thrusting his thin, pale face into the melee.

"Ugh!" the old man answered rather unsatisfactorily.

"If you don't pay me," shrieked the incensed little undertaker, "I'll go right out on the hill and *dig up them boxes, by God!*"

"*Muska ningay!*" (no money) said the old man. "No pay 'em chil'n's money tall. All time lie to us. Goan votem Dimmiticrat, guess."

And with this statement, bearing with it the fate of a national representative, the old chief kicked the tenacious slumber out of his pony and rode back to the Agency.

"Eh?" ejaculated the politician; "Votin' Democratic, eh? Well, I'll be cussed! It'll snow us under! Why in thunder do they refuse to pay the money to the minor children? I tell you, gentlemen, it'll snow us under!"

"Drat politics!" squeaked the little undertaker. "Wisht I'd a-buried 'em all afore now. Cussed if I don't go right out on that there hill and dig them boxes up!"

The day wore on with an alarming recrudescence of Democracy among the red men (who are not red, but chocolate). In the afternoon, the little undertaker chased White Horse, another leading man of the tribe, into the brush and returned with a broad grin upon his face.

"Beats the devil!" ejaculated the thin politician, "where a body sometimes finds merriment! How's he votin', Comfort?"

"Votin' Democrat—the whole cussed posse of 'em! But I don't give a cuss—Democrat or Republican money's all the same to me. I got \$15; one of his kids I planted five years ago; died of Cuban itch; four-foot pine box! He, he, he! I don't give a cuss how they're votin'."

That night there was a meeting of Republican politicians at the Agency office. A most alarming landslide had begun that day, bearing disaster to the ranks of the Grand Old Party.

"Some more of those confounded departmental rulings!" exclaimed the Agent to the company pres-

ent. "It's this grandmotherly solicitude for the Indian that makes him an irresponsible scamp. Why, if the Government had turned them all loose to sink or swim a decade ago, Natural Law would, by this time, have solved the much mooted Indian question. But what are we to do?" And the Agent stroked his Van Dyke beard in perplexity.

"We've got to do something," said the lean wolf with the body like a question mark; "and there's only one thing to do—get Meekleman here. You remember how he wheedled them into line four years ago. If there's a man in the world who can bring them around, it's Meekleman. And we'd better get McBarty here, too. The two of them may be able to kick up a successful powwow."

Charles D. Meekleman was a Nebraska politician who was almost a statesman, and had held important positions in Washington official circles. McBarty was the Republican candidate for Congress. It was decided that they should be sent for at once.

It was Friday evening when the two great men arrived; and upon Saturday morning they came forth and allowed themselves to be gazed upon freely. McBarty was a heavy-set, middle-sized man, with an earnest expression of countenance, and the rather bewildered air of a candidate being led forth to sacrifice for the first time. Meekleman was tall, superbly built, clad in the faultless manner and bearing about him that air of refinement which had won him from his rural constituents the name of "Gen-

tleman Charlie." The manner of his shaking hands with any comer was most consummate flattery; and although it was done with an air of magnanimous condescension, there was something masterful in his eyes, looking down kindly from his heavy brows, as from a battlemented tower, that established the utmost confidence. He had the happy faculty of disposing of a boiled potato at a farmhouse with a refined dignity acquired over many a French dish at the banquets of the distinguished; and the manner in which he addressed a bunch of squaws and bucks as "ladies and gentlemen," was surpassingly suave.

The two great men strolled leisurely, arm in arm, down the dusty road to the pay station, stopping often to shake hands with the Omahas, and radiating smiles like small human suns. When they had reached the pay station, Mr. Meekleman approached the Agent, busy signing checks, and said in his big, clear, slow voice, that it might be heard by the lounging Indians: "Major, I wish you would announce to the gentlemen that I want to talk to them this evening over at Fire Chief lodge. Tell the gentlemen that I am very much grieved for them, and that I shall endeavour to right their wrongs;" and he raised his heavy brows and condescendingly smiled upon the brown loungers, while the Agent instructed a policeman to make the announcement.

That evening a party consisting of the Agent, Messrs. Meekleman and McBarty, and several local politicians, proceeded on foot to Fire Chief lodge,

which is a large octagonal shack placed in a lonesome valley a mile distant from the Agency.

"Brace up, Mac!" said Meekleman, as the two walked along the lonesome prairie road. "To-night I shall have the honour to make a man of you—the Honourable James McBarty! Have a cigar and try to keep cool."

"Yes, thanks. I was just feeling a little surprised at the lonesome road that seems to lead to Congress—that was all. Do you really suppose we can win them over?"

"Well, you shall see," returned Meekleman. "Follow my suit and don't make faces at the soup; for one really must drink soup, you know, to be Congressman from this district. I say, Mac, did you ever smoke killikinick? Well, anyway, I advise you to smoke it to-night till the back of your neck aches. Ha, ha! There is really no royal road to Congress, Mac!" And Meekleman slapped the candidate upon the shoulder and filled the great prairie silence with jovial laughter.

As the party neared the lodge, from which the light of the fire within streamed out through the windows into the moon haze, they heard the sound of the drum and the singing that accompanies an Indian feast; a wild melodious flight of notes, threaded with the snarl of the drum like the beat of a fevered temple, rising in ecstasy, like the wail of a fitful night wind in the scrub oaks of a bluff, and falling suddenly to die in a guttural note like the

burr of a wounded rattlesnake. A barbaric music filled with the sounds of Nature and old as the wrinkled prairie!

"This," said Meekleman, stopping near the entrance to listen to the deep, beautiful voices within, "This, McBarty, is the Indian of romance. Now for the bitter truth—and the soup!"

As they entered the long, narrow passageway leading into the lodge, they saw before them a large octagonal room with a wood fire blazing in the centre. About the dusky walls the huge, perverted shadows of the singers flitted in grotesque dances as they swayed in the ecstasy of song. A circle of brown men sat about the sputtering fire over which a large iron kettle steamed forth the scent of beef. Near the circle sat the smaller circle of drummers about a washtub with a cowhide stretched across it.

Within the larger circle near the fire, sat a squaw, cutting bits of beef from a quantity of ribs that she held conveniently in her lap.

"Shade of Mrs. Rorer!" exclaimed the would-be Congressman in a whisper to his companion; "is *that* the soup?"

"Hist!" returned Meekleman; "one should be willing to suffer for his country!"

At the entrance of the great men, the singing ceased abruptly, and the singers turned their sullen, brute-like eyes upon their visitors and grunted.

"Are there any of the leading men here?" asked

Meekleman of the Agent. Rainwalker and White Horse were both present.

"Ah!" said Meekleman, pointing to an unusually homely old Indian; "who is that black scamp with the big face and the remarkably stupendous nose?"

"Rainwalker," replied the Agent; "a leader; it would be well to make peace with him first."

Meekleman approached the old chief with his soft, white hand extended and his face the picture of rapture.

"Well, well, Rainwalker! Here you are! I'm glad to see you, Mr. Rainwalker! How well you look; I needn't ask about your health; your complexion could scarcely be surpassed!"

Mr. Rainwalker turned a shade lighter with pride and grinned, returning the great man's salutation with a large bunch of beef-scented silence.

Meekleman sat down cross-legged in the circle and took the circulating stone pipe in his turn, smoked heroically and drank large quantities of hot soup. The sullen faces of the firelit circle brightened. Old Rainwalker began to talk in his own tongue, staring meanwhile meditatively into the fire. For several minutes his deep musical voice ran on with occasional dignified pauses and gestures indicating that he spoke of the great white man beside him. Meekleman gave an Indian youth a coin to act as interpreter.

"He says," said the youth, "that you all time walk with good people and eat good stuff, but you

are not too good, he says, to smoke and eat with us, he says. He likes you pretty much, guess."

The old chief talked again for some time, and then lapsed into dignified silence.

"He says," continued the youth, "that you have lived in the same lodge with the Big Father at Washington, and you can get the money for the chil'ns, he guess. That's what he says."

"Tell my dear brother," said Meekleman, "that my heart is warm toward my brown brothers, and that the children shall have their money. Tell him that I played with the Big Father when he was a little boy, and that I know the Big Father would be terribly angry if he knew that the children had been refused their money. Tell him that I will see that they get it."

This short speech translated, sent a murmur of joy around the circle. White Horse arose from the opposite side of the circle and brought a cup of hot soup to his white brother as a special favour.

"And now," said Meekleman, arising majestically as beffited the erstwhile playmate of the President, "I shall introduce to you Mr. McBarty. He will go to Washington for you and he will do many good things for the Omahas."

Mr. McBarty came forth and fell to shaking the brown hands of the grown-up children. He started with Rainwalker, who carefully rubbed his left hand upon his blanket before presenting it to the future saviour of his race. Then after having shaken all

the hands, including that of the squaw who stripped beef from the ribs, the potential Congressman fell heroically upon the soup and the killikinick.

An old Indian placed cross-legged near a wood fire with the feel of hot soup in his belly, invariably becomes reminiscent. Old White Horse sat staring into the sputtering flame with his face as expressionless as a stone statue of Buddha, and his voice began in a low, musical tone, rising as his memory quickened, and modulated with great oratorical skill, for which he was noted in the tribe. His words translated ran thus:

“These new times are not like the old times. When we old men were young and the bison still bellowed on the prairies, we were strong and swift and wise. Now we are weak and slow and not wise. I cannot understand. It is all like a day when there is fog everywhere. When we were young and fought the Pawnees and the Sioux, there were no bigger, wiser men than Nuzhee Mona [Rainwalker] and Shonga Ska [White Horse]. Look at us now! We are old and slow and we cannot see far to-day. Once when I was young I found a sick bison bull wandering in the hills. He was weak and half blind and he had lost the trail. We are weak and half blind and we cannot find the old trail. I cannot understand.”

“Ah, ah, ah!” A groan ran about the firelit circle, intent upon the old wise man’s word.

“We cannot find Wakunda [God] any more. He

is not in the valleys any more, nor on the hills. We cannot talk to the big white Wakunda. What can we old men say to our foolish people when they need wise words? Every day they are more like badgers. They eat much, drink firewater, and are very foolish. But we have these white brothers and we will listen to them. Their wisdom is the new wisdom; we will listen to them."

"Ah, ah!" assented the listeners.

For an hour the circle sat staring into the flame, thinking of the old times. Then without a word, Rainwalker and White Horse arose and passed out of the lodge and the others followed.

"Well," said Meekleman to McBarty, as they walked along the lonesome road toward the Agency, "I have the honour to address the Hon. James McBarty!"

The other did not answer for several minutes.

"Meekleman," said McBarty at length, "don't you suppose I *can* do something for these poor devils?"

"Ah, McBarty," returned Meekleman, "I am afraid you will never be a politician!"

Upon the following Monday morning when the tribe gathered for the continuation of the big payment, the news began to circulate that the great white man had gone to see the Big Father at Washington about the payment of the money to the minor children. As this news was authenticated by White Horse and Rainwalker themselves, it was readily

believed, and in one day four hundred brown votes swung over to the Republican faith again.

On Tuesday, a week before election, there was not a brown Democrat on the reserve. This state of affairs continued on through the week until Friday evening, at which time no word had come from the Big Father.

The Democratic candidate for Congress, Judge Roberts, had arrived at the Agency during the week to battle in person against the impending calamity. All week he and his retainers led the forlorn hope. But on Friday afternoon, when the news so impatiently awaited by the Indians had not yet arrived, the all but lost cause began to gain a foothold in a persistent rumour that hinted that maybe the Indian had been fooled after all. Maybe Meekleman didn't intend to intercede for the Indians at all; and accordingly, one by one, the brown men wondered, doubted, wavered and lost hope, until by Saturday evening, when the pay station closed, there had begun a restless, slow, and certain movement among the Omahas toward the Democratic ranks.

When Monday morning came, twenty-four hours before the opening of the polls, the political condition of the Omahas could have been summed up in one laconic conversation:

“Well, *cuggie*, [friend] how are you voting?”

“Dimmiticrat, guess!”

McBarty strolled leisurely about among the Omahas with an enigmatical smile upon his face, seeming

to be unconscious of the crushing defeat he was, apparently, about to receive. The day wore on and hour by hour grew the triumph of the Judge, who now already felt himself the "Gentleman from Nebraska."

At five o'clock in the evening the two candidates were seen talking together at the door of the pay station.

"Well, Mac," said the Judge, "it's looking a little dark for you. I swear, a week ago I would have sold my chances for a cent!"

McBarty repeatedly looked up the dusty government trail leading north from the station with an expression of anxiety.

"Well," he said, "allow me to congratulate the Hon. John Roberts of Nebraska!" He smiled gravely as he shook the hand of his rival. "All I regret now," he added, "is that I drank that soup!"

"Thanks!" replied the Judge. "It really seems a shame, however, that one should go to Congress at the hands of these savages, eh?"

"Yes," said McBarty, taking a long gaze up the trail; "it is a shame, to be sure!"

At that moment a little farce was being enacted a mile up the road. Within the covering of a wild plum thicket at the side of the trail a saddled and bridled horse was lariated to a stake, and a man sat near by upon a rock, repeatedly tapping the horse on the flanks as it galloped about in a circle.

"Lather up there!" cried the man, as he nipped

the horse with the whiplash; "lather up there!" And the horse dashed about the circle until its flanks were dripping and its mouth was white with foam.

At length the man took out his watch, saw that it was 5:30 o'clock, and untying the lariat, he mounted and put the spurs to his already jaded animal, dashing at a furious pace down the dusty old trail toward the Agency.

A few moments later McBarty and the Judge caught sight of a furious rider dashing toward them in a cloud of dust.

"Who do you suppose that can be riding so fast?" said the Judge.

"Oh," said McBarty, smiling broadly, "that, Judge, is merely my election coming up at the gallop!"

Amid dust and yelling and a general spectacular confusion the horseman dashed up to the door of the pay station, threw his horse on its haunches in stopping, and cried: "A telegram from Washington for the Agent!"

In a few moments a great crowd of Indians had gathered about the horse and rider. The Agent, with a smile upon his face, rushed out of the station and seized a bit of yellow paper that the rider held in his hand. Breathlessly the crowd of Omahas waited.

"Listen!" shouted a crier in the Omaha tongue, standing by the Agent, who was reading the telegram. "The Big Father at Washington sends this

word to his brown brothers: 'The children's money shall be paid!' ”

For a moment following the shout of the crier, there was a great silence. Then a roar went up from the Omahas—a wild, hoarse shout of joy! Judge Roberts turned pale, and extending his hand to McBarty, said: “ Well, you have won. Allow me to congratulate the Hon. James McBarty of Nebraska.”

And when the next morning's sun arose, the polls were besieged by a throng of brown Republicans.

XIX

THE LAST THUNDER SONG

IT is an ancient custom to paint tragedy in blood tints. This is because men were once merely animals, and have not as yet been able to live down their ancestry. Yet the stroke of a dagger is a caress beside the throb of hopeless days.

Life can ache; the living will tell you this. But the dead make no complaint.

There is no greater tragedy than the fall of a dream! Napoleon dreamed; so did a savage. It is the same. I know of the scene of a great tragedy. Very few have recognised it as such; there was so little noise along with it. It happened at the Omaha Agency, which is situated on the Missouri River some seventy miles above Omaha.

The summer of 1900 debilitated all thermal adjectives. It was not hot; it was *Saharical!* It would hardly have been hyperbole to have said that the Old Century lay dying of a fever. The untrilled hills of the reservation thrust themselves up in the August sunshine like the emaciated joints of one bedridden. The land lay as yellow as the skin of a fever patient, except in those rare spots where the melancholy corn struggled heartlessly up a hillside, making a blotch like a bedsore!

The blood of the prairie was impoverished, and the sky would give no drink with which to fill the dwindling veins. When one wished to search the horizon for the cloud that was not there, he did it from beneath an arched hand. The small whirlwinds that awoke like sudden fits of madness in the sultry air, rearing yellow columns of dust into the sky—these alone relieved the monotony of dazzle.

Every evening the clouds rolled flashing about the horizon and thundered back into the night. They were merely taunts, like the holding of a cool cup just out of reach of a fevered mouth; and the clear nights passed, bringing dewless dawns, until the ground cracked like a parched lip!

The annual Indian powwow was to be ended prematurely that year, for the sun beat uninvitingly upon the flat bottom where the dances were held, and the Indians found much comfort in the shade of their summer tepees. But when it was noised about that, upon the next day, the old medicine-man Mahowari (Passing Cloud) would dance potent dances and sing a thunder song with which to awaken the lazy thunder spirits to their neglected duty of rain-making, then the argument of the heat became feeble.

So the next morning, the bronze head of every Indian teepethold took his pony, his dogs, his squaw, and his papooses of indefinite number to the powwow ground. In addition to these, the old men carried with them long memories and an implicit faith.

The young men, who had been away to Indian

school, and had succeeded to some extent in stuffing their brown skins with white souls, carried with them curiosity and doubt, which, if properly united, beget derision.

The old men went to a shrine; the young men went to a show. When a shrine becomes a show, the World advances a step. And *that* is the benevolence of Natural Law!

About the open space in which the dances were held, an oval covering had been built with willow boughs, beneath which the Indians lounged in sweating groups. Slowly about the various small circles went the cumbersome stone pipes.

To one listening, drowsed with the intense sunshine, the *buzzle* and mutter and snarl of the gossiping Omahas seemed the grotesque echoes from a vanished age. Between the fierce dazzle of the sun and the sharply contrasting blue shade, there was but a line of division; yet a thousand years lay between one gazing in the sun and those dozing in the shadow. It was as if God had flung down a bit of the Young World's twilight into the midst of the Old World's noon. Here lounged the masterpiece of the toiling centuries—a Yankee. There sat the remnant of a race as primitive as Israel. Yet the white man looked on with the contempt of superiority.

Before ten o'clock everybody had arrived and his family with him. A little group, composed of the Indian Agent, the Agency Physician, the Mission

Preacher, and a newspaper man, down from the city for reportorial purposes, waited and chatted, sitting upon a ragged patch of available shadow.

“These Omahas are an exceptional race,” the preacher was saying in his ministerial tone of voice; “an exceptional race!”

The newspaper man mopped his face, lit a cigarette and nodded assent with a hidden meaning twinkling in his eye.

“Quite exceptional!” he said, tossing his head in the direction of an unusually corpulent bunch of steaming, sweating, bronze men and women. “God, like some lesser master-musicians, has not confined himself to grand opera, it seems!”

He took a long pull at his cigarette, and his next words came out in a cloud of smoke.

“This particular creation savours somewhat of *opera bouffe*!”

With severe unconcern the preacher mended the broken thread of his discourse. “Quite an exceptional race in many ways. The Omaha is quite as honest as the white man.”

“That is a truism!” The pencil-pusher drove this observation between the minister’s words like a wedge.

“In his natural state he was much more so,” uninterruptedly continued the preacher; he was used to continuous discourse. “I have been told by many of the old men that in the olden times an Indian could leave his tepee for months at a time, and on

his return would find his most valuable possessions untouched. I tell you, gentlemen, the Indian is like a prairie flower that has been transplanted from the blue sky and the summer sun and the pure winds into the steaming, artificial atmosphere of the hothouse! A glass roof is not the blue sky! Man's talent is not God's genius! That is why you are looking at a perverted growth.

“Look into an Indian's face and observe the ruins of what was once manly dignity, indomitable energy, masterful prowess! When I look upon one of these faces, I have the same thoughts as, when travelling in Europe, I looked upon the ruins of Rome.

“Everywhere broken arches, fallen columns, tumbled walls! Yet through these as through a mist one can discern the magnificence of the living city. So in looking upon one of these faces, which are merely ruins in another sense. They were once as noble, as beautiful as——”

In his momentary search for an eloquent simile, the minister paused.

“As pumpkin pies!” added the newspaper man with a chuckle; and he whipped out his notebook and pencil to jot down this brilliant thought, for he had conceived a very witty “story” which he would pound out for the Sunday edition.

“Well,” said the Agency Physician, finally sucked into the whirlpool of discussion, “it seems to me that there is no room for crowing on either side. Indians are pretty much like white men; livers and kidneys

and lungs, and that sort of thing; slight difference in the pigment under the skin. I've looked into the machinery of both species and find just as much room in one as the other for a soul!"

"And both will go upward," added the minister.

"Like different grades of tobacco," observed the Indian Agent, "the smoke of each goes up in the same way."

"Just so," said the reporter; "but let us cut out the metaphysics. I wonder when this magical *cuggie* is going to begin his humid evolutions. Lamentable, isn't it, that such institutions as rain prayers should exist on the very threshold of the Twentieth Century?"

"I think," returned the minister, "that the Twentieth Century has no intention of eliminating God! This medicine-man's prayer, in my belief, is as sacred as the prayer of any churchman. The difference between Wakunda and God is merely orthographical."

"But," insisted the cynical young man from the city, "I had not been taught to think of God as of one who forgets! Do you know what I would do if I had no confidence in the executive ability of my God?"

Taking the subsequent silence as a question, the young man answered: "Why, I would take a day off and whittle one out of wood!"

"A youth's way is the wind's way," quoted the preacher, with a paternal air.

"And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts; but what is all this noise about?" returned the reporter.

A buzz of expectant voices had grown at one end of the oval, and had spread contagiously throughout the elliptical strip of shade. For with slow, majestic step the medicine-man, Mahowari, entered the enclosure and walked toward the centre. The fierce sun emphasised the brilliancy of the old man's garments and glittered upon the profusion of trinkets, the magic heirlooms of the medicine-man. It was not the robe nor the dazzling trinkets that caught the eye of one acquainted with Mahowari. It was the erectness of his figure, for he had been bowed with years, and many vertical suns had shone upon the old man's back since his face had been turned toward the ground. But now with firm step and form rigidly erect he walked.

Any sympathetic eye could easily read the thoughts that passed through the old man's being like an elixir infusing youth. Now in his feeble years would come his greatest triumph! To-day he would sing with greater power than ever he had sung. Wakunda would hear the cry. The rains would come! Then the white men would be stricken with belief!

Already his heart sang before his lips. In spite of the hideous painting of his face, the light of triumph shone there like the reflection of a great fire.

Slowly he approached the circle of drummers who sat in the glaring centre of the ellipse of sunlight. It was all as though the First Century had awakened like a ghost and stood in the very doorway of the Twentieth!

When Mahowari had approached within a yard of the drums, he stopped, and raising his arms and his eyes to the cloudless sky, uttered a low cry like a wail of supplication. Then the drums began to throb with that barbaric music as old as the world; a sound like the pounding of a fever temple, with a recurring snarl like the warning of a rattlesnake.

Every sound of the rejoicing and suffering prairie echoes in the Indian's drum.

With a slow, majestic bending of the knees and an alternate lifting of his feet, the medicine-man danced in a circle about the snarling drums. Then like a faint wail of winds toiling up a wooded bluff, his thunder song began.

The drone and whine of the mysterious, untranslatable words pierced the drowse of the day, lived for a moment with the echoes of the drums among the surrounding hills, and languished from a whisper into silence. At intervals the old man raised his face, radiant with fanatic ecstasy, to the meridian glare of the sun, and the song swelled to a supplicating shout.

Faster and faster the old man moved about the circle; louder and wilder grew the song. Those who

watched from the shade were absorbed in an intense silence, which, with the drowsy of the sultry day, made every sound a paradox! The old men forgot their pipes and sat motionless.

Suddenly, at one end of the covering, came the sound of laughter! At first an indefinite sound like the spirit of merriment entering a capricious dream of sacred things; then it grew and spread until it was no longer merriment, but a loud jeer of derision! It startled the old men from the intenseness of their watching. They looked up and were stricken with awe. The young men were jeering this, the holiest rite of their fathers!

Slower and slower the medicine-man danced; fainter and fainter grew the song and ceased abruptly. With one quick glance, Mahowari saw the shattering of his hopes. He glanced at the sky; but saw no swarm of black spirits to avenge such sacrilege. Only the blaze of the sun, the glitter of the arid zenith!

In that one moment, the temporary youth of the old man died out. His shoulders drooped to their wonted position. His limbs tottered. He was old again.

It was the Night stricken heart-sick with the laughter of the Dawn. It was the audacious Present jeering at the Past, tottering with years. At that moment, the impudent, cruel, brilliant youth called Civilisation snatched the halo from the grey hairs of patriarchal Ignorance. Light flouted the rags

of Night. A clarion challenge shrilled across the years.

Never before in all the myriad moons had such a thing occurred. It was too great a cause to produce an effect of grief or anger. It stupefied. The old men and women sat motionless. They could not understand.

With uneven step and with eyes that saw nothing, Mahowari passed from among his kinsmen and tottered up the valley toward his lonesome shack and tepee upon the hillside. It was far past noon when the last of the older Omahas left the scene of the dance.

The greater number of the white men who had witnessed the last thunder dance of the Omahas went homeward much pleased. The show had turned out quite funny indeed. "Ha, ha, ha! Did you see how surprised the old *cuggy* looked? He, he, he!" Life, being necessarily selfish, argues from its own standpoint.

But as the minister rode slowly toward his home there was no laughter in his heart. He was saying to himself: "If the whole fabric of my belief should suddenly be wrenched from me, what then?" Even this question was born of selfishness, but it brought pity.

In the cool of the evening the minister mounted his horse and rode to the home of Mahowari, which was a shack in the winter and a tepee in the summer. Dismounting, he threw the bridle reins upon the

ground, and raised the door flap of the tepee. Mahowari sat cross-legged upon the ground, staring steadily before him with unseeing eyes.

“How!” said the minister.

The old Indian did not answer. There was no expression of grief or anger or despair upon his face. He sat like a statue. Yet, the irregularity of his breathing showed where the pain lay. An Indian suffers in his breast. His face is a mask.

The minister sat down in front of the silent old man and, after the immemorial manner of ministers, talked of a better world, of a pitying Christ, and of God, the Great Father. For the first time the Indian raised his face and spoke briefly in English:

“God? He dead, guess!”

Then he was silent again for some time.

Suddenly his eyes lit up with a light that was not the light of age. The heart of his youth had awakened. The old memories came back and he spoke fluently in his own tongue, which the minister understood.

“These times are not like the old times. The young men have caught some of the wisdom of the white man. Nothing is sure. It is not good. I cannot understand. Everything is young and new. All old things are dead. Many moons ago, the wisdom of Mahowari was great. I can remember how my father said to me one day when I was yet young and all things lay new before me: ‘Let my son go to a high hill and dream a great dream’; and I went up

in the evening and cried out to Wakunda and I slept and dreamed.

“ I saw a great cloud sweeping up from under the horizon, and it was terrible with lightning and loud thunder. Then it passed over me and rumbled down the sky and disappeared. And when I awoke and told my people of my dream, they rejoiced and said: ‘ Great things are in store for this youth. We shall call him the Passing Cloud, and he shall be a thunder man, keen and quick of thought, with the keenness and quickness of the lightning; and his name shall be as thunder in the ears of men.’ And I grew and believed in these sayings and I was strong. But now I can see the meaning of the dream—a great light and a great noise and a passing.”

The old man sighed, and the light passed out of his eyes. Then he looked searchingly into the face of the minister and said, speaking in English:

“ You white medicine-man. You pray? ”

The minister nodded.

Mahowari turned his gaze to the ground and said wearily:

“ White God dead too, guess.”

XX

THE NEMESIS OF THE DEUCES

FRENCHY called for two cards and reached for a glass and the bottle. His head swam dizzily. The clinking of glasses at the bar smote upon his ears like gongs. He was about to risk upon one "show-down" the realisation of a five-years' dream. He felt certain of losing; that was the strange thing about it. Yet somewhere in the buzzing back of his head a compelling little devil whispered and he obeyed.

He drank three big ones straight, and for a moment things stood still and the buzzing ceased; but in the sudden silence the hissing of the little devil increased to a roaring like the river's in the June rise. "*All on the deuces! All on the deuces! Every damned cent!*" That is what the little devil in the back of his head was howling now.

"But if I lose it all—and wanting to go back home in the spring?" That was the question his pounding heart hurled at the insistent little devil.

"You won *once*—didn't you—*didn't you?*—**DIDN'T YOU?**" howled back the little devil jeeringly.

"Five hundred," said Frenchy quietly. His bronze face had grown livid; his black eyes narrowed and

glittered with a steady stare. With a hand that betrayed the least perceptible tremor, he pushed the chips to the centre.

The next man tossed his hand into the discards. The next hesitated, carefully studying the face of Frenchy with a furtive lifting of the eyes under his hat brim; he too laid down his hand.

“Raise you two hundred,” said the next with quiet cheerfulness.

“Two hundred more,” said the next nonchalantly, drumming a devil’s tattoo with his fingers on the table.

The fifth drew a long breath, grinned nervously, showing his teeth like a hungry wolf—and tossed his hand into the discards.

It was now up to Frenchy.

“Pardon me,” said he, “but did you call me?”

His face had turned a dull, ghastly green, but his voice was quiet and clear.

“Raised it.”

“Oh, certainly,” said he, smiling. “Thinking of something else—trip home, I guess.” His voice lowered until it was almost inaudible. This absent-mindedness was unusual for Frenchy.

An oppressive silence had fallen in the barroom of the “Big 6.” There was no longer any clinking of glasses or hum of maudlin voices. The loungers drew up in a hushed circle about the table and stared with fascinated eyes. A “big game” was on—and it was up to Frenchy. Frenchy was no quitter; he

was a gambler to his finger-tips. "Frenchy? He'd bet on which'd be the last breath of his dying mother!" That was the way the popular legend ran, and the man lived up to it.

"Stake it all—stake it all on the deuces—*the deuces*—THE DEUCES!" The little devil in the back of his head was shrieking now and stamping red-hot heels into Frenchy's brain.

"But the trip home—I've planned five years—" urged his pounding heart.

"You won on them *once*—didn't you?—*didn't you?*—DIDN'T YOU?" reiterated the little devil.

Frenchy quietly poured out another glass and downed it. Then he pulled off his boots, produced a bunch of bills from the bottom of each, put on his boots again and looked at his hand.

"Come two thousand more!" he whispered.

A sound of deeper breathing grew up about the fascinated circle of on-lookers. Frenchy had gone into his boots—they knew what that meant. Would the others stay? *Would they?*

The place became uncanny with stillness. Nothing moved in the room. The circle of eyes stared steadily upon the three who sat with expressionless faces blanched with the pitiless struggle that was going on. For a minute that seemed endless the soundless battle continued. Psychic forces exchanged invisible sword-thrusts across the table. Nerve wrestled with nerve that cowered but still fought on.

The whole scene vanished for Frenchy. It seemed

to him that he was the centre of a silent hollowness; only a voice, that was rather an ache felt than a sound heard, kept up a pitiless jeering.

“They’ll stay—they’ll stay,” shrieked the little devil; “your bluff won’t work—you’re a dead horse and they’re crows—crows—crows!”

“They’re weakening!” beat the heart of Frenchy.

“Deuces—ha, ha! Deuces! And they’ve both got face cards—deuces—ho, ho!—going home, eh?—win on deuces?—ho, ho, ho—deuces!” The insistent devil laughed spitefully.

“Raise you five hundred more!”

The words echoed and re-echoed in the lonesome hollowness. Frenchy stared at his cards.

“Five hundred more!”

Frenchy winced and shivered. It seemed to him that a long, thin-bladed knife had reached out of the silent hollow that surrounded him and stabbed him twice in the breast.

“Ho, ho, ho!” went the little devil at the back of his head. “Stay with ‘em! Put up the horses—everything on the deuces—ho, ho, ho!”

“But I can lay down now and save the horses,” urged the sick heart of Frenchy.

“You won on the deuces *once!*” shrieked the little devil; “didn’t you—DIDN’T YOU?”

Frenchy now heard his own voice growing up out of the hollow. “Taken: my five horses and outfit are good for it.”

Then he emerged from the soundless hollow and

was aware of the circle of glittering eyes staring down on the field whereon he had just staked five years of his life and his last cherished dream.

“Full house—aces on queens.”

Frenchy heard the words and grinned exultantly. The little spiteful devil was silent.

“Four kings!”

Frenchy dropped his cards face up and reached for the bottle. “Ho, ho, ho!” went the little devil, dancing all over his brain; “everything lost on the deuces—dead horse for the crows to pick!—he, he, he!”

A ripple of exclamations ran about the circle of loungers as they leaned forward to see the hand upon which Frenchy had staked all that he owned.

“Deuces! By the jumping—four dirty deuces!”

“*Deuces?*”

“Four of ‘em.”

“How’s that for a bluff?”

“Fool play!”

A buzzing undertone of comment filled the room and steadily grew into a chattering as of crows about a spot where something has just died. Frenchy seemed not to hear; he was busy filling and refilling glasses. The man with the four kings quietly raked in his winnings. “And the horses——?” he suggested.

Frenchy set the drained glass down with a bang, and with a snake-like forward thrusting of the head leered hideously at the winner. “*Can’t you shut up*

about the horses?" He forced the words menacingly through his shut teeth.

A hush fell upon the loungers as they looked upon the pinched, malignant face with the upper lip lifted quiveringly and the close-set teeth showing beneath. This was no longer the Frenchy of legend; that Frenchy had always been known as one who lost or won large sums with the utter nervelessness of a machine. This was no longer the face of Frenchy—the gay, careless, haughty face of him who flirted with Fortune. This was a new Frenchy—a terrible Frenchy; with a coiled snake lurking just behind each glittering eyeball. This face sent a shiver through the crowd—like the sight of an ugly knife unsheathed in anger.

The loungers with affected carelessness began to move away. With a lightning sweep of the hands Frenchy drew his guns and banged them down violently on the table before him. "Stay where you are, gentlemen!" he said; "I'm going to talk and I want an audience. When I'm done talking, I'm off on the long trail and the first man that moves goes with me!"

There had always been a winsome something in the voice of the man. It was now commanding, irresistible. The loungers stood still and stared dumbfounded upon this terrible new version of an old legend.

Frenchy picked up four cards from his hand and held them up fanwise before his enforced listeners.

"Look at 'em!" he shouted hoarsely. "Look at 'em! Let 'em burn through your hides into your souls! Oh, you don't see anything, eh? Don't one of you dare to grin!"

One hand fumbled nervously with the guns.

"What do you see? I say, what do you see? Four deuces? That all? I'll tell you what *I* see. I see the red, warm hearts of two friends! I see diamonds that are cheap beside such hearts! I see a club—a black, brutal, treacherous club—that struck down a friend! And I see the devil's spades that dug his grave! That's what I see! Look hard!"

Frenchy seemed to exercise an uncanny influence over his hearers. Not one moved—all stared upon the four upheld deuces.

"It's the devil's story, gentlemen," he continued in a low, husky voice. "It's hung by me for three bloody years—it haunts me! I've got to tell it."

He passed his free hand over his forehead beaded with sweat. Then he whispered a question to the spellbound audience:

"Did any of you know the Kid—Kid Smith?"

A momentary expression of infinite kindness softened the face of Frenchy, only to give way immediately to deep quivering lines of anguish. He continued tremulously.

"I knew him—the Kid. Had the biggest, bravest heart that ever beat in the God-forsaken white spaces of a map. One of that breed of fellows that the world nails to its crosses—the Kid was. And we

were friends; that is, he was a friend. He gave and I took, and he was happier in the giving than I in the taking. That's the way it always goes: one gives and one takes—and God pity the man that only takes!

“Why did I bet on the deuces? Oh, the damned, dirty deuces! Don't I know the game? By God, I know every card like a kid knows his mother's face! Didn't I know it was the last ditch for me and no hope? I tell you, gentlemen, I didn't play 'em. The Devil played 'em for me—the black Devil of the dirty deuces with the fiery feet that have been kicking me hellward for three aching years!

“Look at the cards! Look at 'em! There's blood on every one of 'em, and they stink with the writhing flesh of a friend in the flames!”

Frenchy took another drink and his manner changed. The violence of his delirious outburst gave way to quietness. He spoke in a low, penetrating voice, and the black flame of his eyes held his hearers.

“The Kid and I had been riding across a big stretch of brown grass for two days, and our tongues were thick with thirst. I remember how he gave me the last drops of water we had with us, cussing and damning a man who got thirsty. 'I can go without water with the biggest camel that ever stuck a hoof into the sand,' said he. And I took the water; I always took and the Kid was always giving.

“And along in the evening we struck a little water hole and camped. How the Kid did drink

when he thought I wasn't looking! Oh, he wasn't such a camel for carrying water with him! It was his big heart that carried the water—the sweet, pure, sparkling waters of friendship.

"Along about sundown a dull grey cloud grew up in the west—smoke! But the wind was against it, blowing soft and dry from the east where the river lay thirty miles away. 'Think we'd better ride on?' says the Kid. But I was tired and wanted sleep, and the Kid gave in. Says he, 'Horses need a rest, I guess'; didn't lay it onto me, you know. Giving again, and I taking.

"So we lariated the horses and rolled in. Do you know how a man sleeps after he's been burning dry for days and fills up at last? I plunged into ten thousand fathoms of soft, soft sleep—deep, deep down, where the cool sweet dreams bloom in worlds of crystal. And everywhere in my sleep there were bubbling springs and I drank and drank and drank, and every gulp was sweeter than the last.

"Then the dreams changed and the many bubbling water holes of sleep went dry, and fine hot dust sprayed up out of the chinks where the water had flowed. Then the wind of sleep grew hot and hotter. It scorched my face and sent thin needles of fire into my brain. And then I was standing up coughing and rubbing my eyes and the Kid was beside me. What did we see?

"The wind had veered about while we slept. All

hell was climbing up the west and a booming wind swept howling devils through the smoky twilight. Above the unnatural dawn, long black ragged arms reached out into the zenith and cloaked the stars. I heard a horse snorting and tugging at his lariat.

“‘Good God, Kid!’ I wheezed; ‘let’s be off!’

“The Kid turned his face upon me and smiled—that slow, brave smile haunts me night and day.

“‘Your horse is gone——’ He waved his hand toward the miles of dark that stretched toward the river. ‘Pulled his stake just before you woke up; heard him go.’ The Kid’s voice didn’t even tremble.

“‘Quick!’ I yelled; ‘the matches! Start a back fire!’

“Then a big, cold hand gripped my heart; the Kid had given me the last match that day; I had wanted to smoke.

“All hell behind us and a horse for two! A thirty-mile heat with the mustangs of the Devil, and double weight to carry! It made me sick—dizzy sick. I forgot everything. Oh, gentlemen, when you face hell fire you’ll know if your mother bore a coward.

“For a minute we stared into the west—a minute years long. Big pink waves of smoke rolled into gulfs of purple and disappeared into holes of murk. Above, the blood-red surf frothed and sparkled and fell in yellow showers! Great blankets of dense gloom dropped from the sky and smothered out

the hellish morning, hurling momentary night down the howling wind! Then keen zigzag blades of fire ripped through the belly of the night!

“I felt the Kid’s hand grasp mine. O God! the feel of his hand! ‘One horse for two, Frenchy,’ he said, quiet as a man who proposes another drink at the bar. ‘One of us makes a run for his life; and the other——’ He motioned carelessly toward Hell. ‘One more deal of the cards, Frenchy, and the last for one of us. High hand takes the horse; low hand —produce the deck.’

“I produced the deck—greasy and dog-eared; for many’s the social game the Kid and I had played with ‘em together. We squatted on the prairie in the red twilight, and the Kid dealt. Not a tremor of his perfect gambler’s hands! Cool as though it was a game of penny ante.

“I drew three deuces! *Deuces!* Oh, the damned, dirty deuces!

“‘How many?’ says the Kid pleasantly. For the first time in my life I forgot to guard my hand. A deep rolling thunder had grown up out of the burning west. It seemed I could feel the prairies tremble like a bridge under a drove of sheep. ‘Listen!’ I gasped. ‘It’s the critters coming,’ said the Kid; ‘cattle and buffalo and elk and deer and wolves—the whole posse. How many cards did you call for?—*two*, wasn’t it?’

“He thrust two cards into my hand. One of ‘em was the deuce of hearts! O God! It wasn’t only

the printed heart he gave me; it was the warm, red, beating heart of a friend."

Frenchy dropped his head into his arms on the table and groaned. When he lifted his face again his eyes were wet.

"Four deuces—and they burn holes in the dark whenever I shut my eyes! And all day I see four pairs of devils dancing in the sunlight till my head swims!"

Frenchy dropped his head upon his chest and breathed deep, uneven breaths for a space.

"The Kid had only a pair of face-cards," he continued; "a dinky little pair of face-cards. And for a second the man in me came to the surface, and I threw the four hand down and stamped on it and said I wouldn't leave him. And what did the Kid do? Began with all the blackguard adjectives of the language and ended with 'coward' and threw the bunch in my teeth. 'You're the first man that ever called me a quitter, Frenchy,' he said. 'I played my hand, didn't I? What would you do to a man who'd ask you to take your money back when you'd lost? If I'd won, do you think I wouldn't leave your carcass here to stew, you cussed fool?'

"And then something in the back of my head woke up and howled: 'You won—it's yours—a chance for life—fair play—he'd go if you lost—he'd go!' And there was a roaring in my head and the flaming night whirled 'round, and the bitter words stung me, and my heart hardened—and—I—went.

“ I found the Kid’s horse saddled and bridled. I cut the lariat and leaped astride. I jabbed the spike spurs into the frightened brute till he roared with pain. I had forgotten everything. I was a Fear without a body flying through a darkness that coughed smoke and spit light. And then at last things quit whirling, and I felt the steady *lift, lift, lift* of the good brute racing with all the devils down a heart-breaking stretch for the river.

“ I turned about in the saddle. Half the sky had turned into an open furnace! Above me a great stormy ocean of blood rolled on into the twilight of the east! Blood!—a seething, billowy sea of red blood, with great, red, purring cat-tongues lapping it greedily! Gaudy giant flowers—purple, yellow, red, green—bloomed for a moment in a strange garden of dreams, and nodded in the wind and fell and bloomed again and fell! The infernal beauty of the thing fascinated me for a moment. Then I heard the rumbling—the unceasing thunder. It was louder than before. I thought of the ten thousand sharp hoofs gaining, gaining, with whips of fire lashing them in the rear. And then I thought of the Kid back there.

“ My heart sickened. The hot wind that scorched my face accused me; the choking air accused me. I could see him lying on his face even then with the mad hoofs beating him into a pulp; I could see the writhing of his body as the heat increased; I could smell the stench of his sizzling flesh!

"I reeled in the saddle, yet the mad wish to live lashed my hands to the pommel. But this was only for a moment. The meanest worm that ever wriggled in a dunghill holds fast to his life. I forgot the Kid again; I remembered only myself and that I must ride to win. I pulled the horse down and held him steady. Never did I throw a leg across a better horse than the Kid's—honest, rangy, clean-limbed and deep in the chest! My heart leaped with joy when I heard his long even breathing. I had a great delirious love for the big-hearted brute as I felt his long, even reach, the tireless rhythmic stride that throws the miles behind. The drifting red sea of smoke above cast the wild glare down upon the prairie and made the footing sure. I threw my guns away; I stripped off my coat and gave it to the wind. I knew what an extra pound might mean.

"An elk forged slowly past, his wide antlers tipped with light. An antelope sprang up and bounded away into the twilight ahead. A coyote leaped from a shoe-string clump; he cowered and whined like a whipped dog with his tail between his legs, then raced away down the wind. Snorting shadows began to move to right and left in the further gloom and disappear in the smoke-drift. I was now a part of the ragged edge of the flotsam tossed up by the approaching lip of the flood. I gave my horse another inch of rein and held him steady. The thunder in the rear grew louder; I could hear dimly the wild confusion of animal cries.

I was the fox hearing the yelp of the hounds and racing for cover.

“ Years and years of flight with the breath of an oven to breathe! Years and years of rising and falling, rising and falling, and my throat was tight with the driving smoke. The good brute began to wheeze and cough. I felt the tremor of his wearying muscles, the slight unsteadiness of the knees. I prayed for the river—prayed like a kid at his mother’s knee. I begged the brute to keep his legs; I cursed him when he tottered; I called him baby names and damned him in a breath.

“ And after years the day began—a sneaking shadow of a day, shamed out by the howling western dawn that met it on the run. A storm of sound was all about me. Neck and neck I raced with a buffalo bull that led the herd; his swollen tongue hung from his foaming mouth; his breath rumbled in his throat. Wheezing steers toiled up about me. Deer and elk raced side by side, slowly forging into the van. Grey wolves bounded past, whining and yelping. And my good brute beat away bravely at the few remaining miles. I felt the dry rasp of his lungs and the breaking of his big, strong heart. He stumbled—I gave him the spur to the heel; he gave no sign of pain. He was dying on his feet.

“ And the cheap, dirty day crept in through the smoke—and I thought of the Kid, and lost heart and cared no more about the race. But by and by I saw the river ahead, and we plunged in—a howling,

panting flood of beasts, struggling for the farther shore.

"The sky and the river whirled about me. I felt my horse totter up a sandbank and fall. Then the day went out, and I forgot.

"O God! I wish I'd never waked up! Why didn't the buffalo and the steers beat me into the sand? Why did I wake up?"

Frenchy covered his face with his hands and the tears trickled through his fingers.

"But the dead horse parted the herd, and I woke up and the fire was dead and the sun looked like a moon through the smoke. Three aching years ago, it was; and I've dragged my carcass about and tried to look like a man. But night and day the deuces have followed me and tortured me. They burn holes in the dark whenever I shut my eyes; four pairs of devils dance before me all day in the sun-light till my head whirls."

Frenchy picked up the four deuces and held them tremblingly before the staring crowd.

"Look at 'em! Let 'em burn through your hides into your souls! There's the blood of the Kid on 'em. The damned dirty deuces! They've got me in the last ditch! I'm done!"

Frenchy crushed the cards and dashed them to the floor. He arose unsteadily to his feet, took his guns and staggered out of the barroom of the "Big 6."



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